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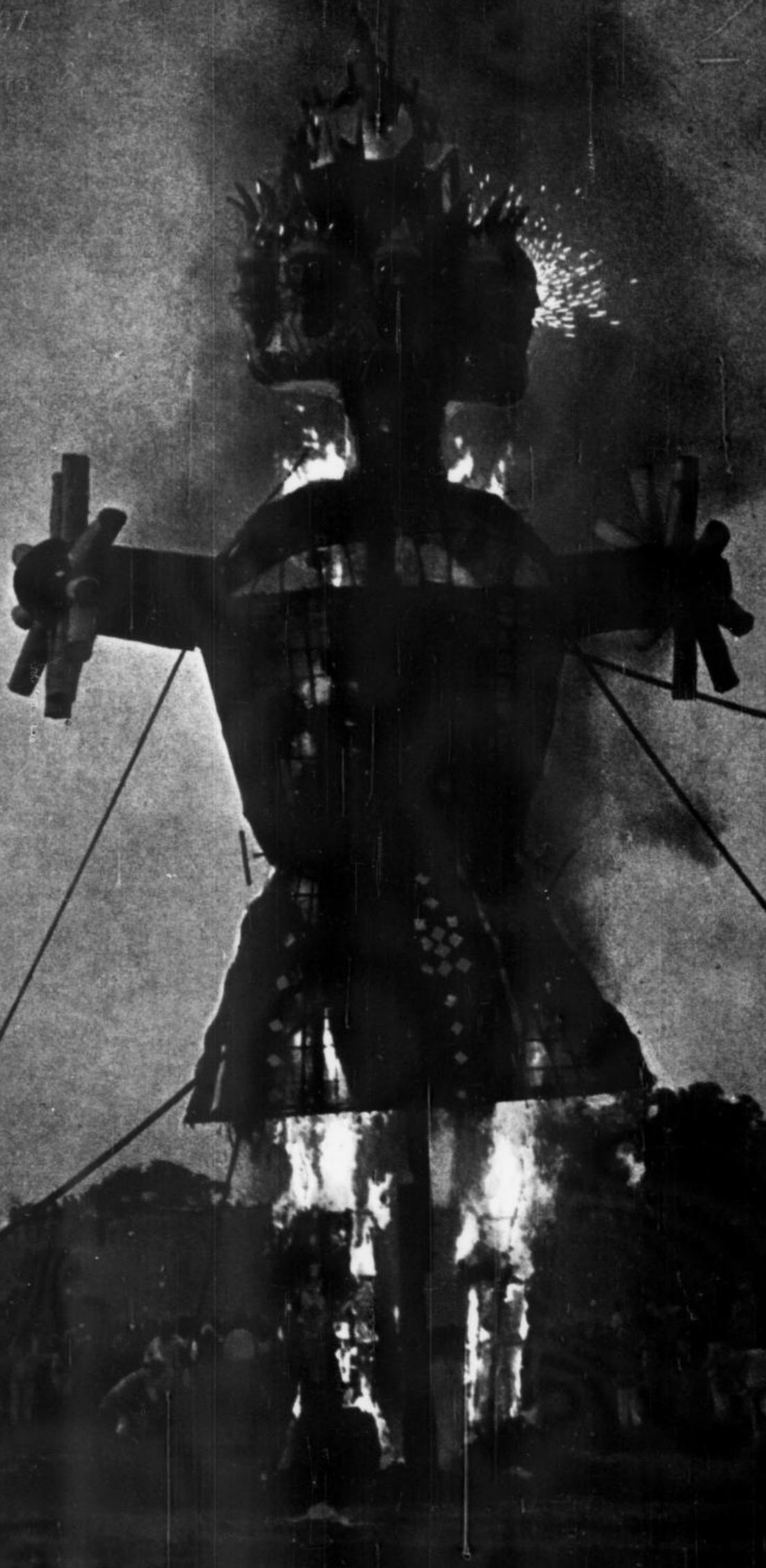

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata

TWO GREAT EPICS OF ASIA

TREASURES OF WORLD ART 21

Ravana shaking Mt. Kailasa

Numerous episodes from the Indian epic, the *Ramayana*, are carved in relief on the walls of the great 8th-century temple, cut from the solid rock at Ellora, near Bombay. This relief, one of the most dramatic and monumental, depicts the episode in which Ravana, the demon-king, attempts to shake and uproot the sacred mountain Kailasa (after which the temple is named) on which the god Shiva and the goddess Parvati are seated. Here, imprisoned within Mt. Kailasa, Ravana strains his many arms in a superhuman effort while Shiva with a single foot steadies the trembling mountain.

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Ravana shaking Mt. Kailasa (India)

Photo © Rapho-Brihat, Paris

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Cover photo

Dusserah is the name of the popular Indian festival held in September-October each year symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. The culmination of nine nights of celebrations, it is linked with the story of the Ramanaya and in northern India the festivities end with the portrayal of Rama's victory over Ravana the demon-king. Here a colossal paste-board effigy of ten-headed Ravana bursts into flames after fiery arrows shot by Rama set off crackers packed inside (See also P. 15). In southern India, Ravana is less a villain than a tragic figure and a victim of his ill-fated passion.

Two great epics of India and South Asia

THE MAHABHARATA AND THE RAMAYANA

by Arthur L. Basham

THE religious and cultural life of the whole of the Indian subcontinent and much of the rest of Asia has been deeply influenced by the two great epic poems of Hinduism, the *Mahabharata* (pronounced Ma-ha-**bah**-ra-ta, accent on "bah") and the *Ramayana* (pronounced Rah-**my**-ana, accent on "my"). Putting aside all question of their merits as literature, which by any standard are very high, they are among the most important poems in the world.

Of the two the *Mahabharata* is in essence the older, its nuclear story having been transmitted from the shadowy period following the composition of the *Rig Veda*, the oldest literature of India. A few of the names of rulers, sages and priests mentioned in the *Mahabharata* also occur in sources of the later Vedic period, and the story of the epic may have developed around traditions of a great battle which took place about 900 B.C.

But with the passing centuries the account was so enlarged and developed by the introduction of new characters and incidents that its historical kernel cannot now be established. There is even some reason to believe that the divine hero Krishna, who plays such an important role in the story as we now have it, was grafted into the poem, and had no part in the original martial tradition out of which it developed. From references in other Sanskrit texts, it seems that the story, in a form not very different from that which we now know, was current in northern India a century or two before our era and perhaps as early as 400 B.C.

ARTHUR L. BASHAM *is professor of Asian Civilization at the Australian National University, Canberra. He formerly taught at London University where he was lecturer in History of India and later professor of the History of South Asia. This year he has been visiting professor at the South Asia Regional Studies Graduate School, University of Pennsylvania. Professor Basham has written widely on Indian history and civilization: "The Wonder that was India" (Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1954); "Studies in Indian History and Culture" (Samboohi Publications, Calcutta, 1964) and "Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture" (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1966).*

The plot of the *Mahabharata* is a complicated one. Like the Greek stories of the Trojan war out of which emerged the *Iliad*, and like the cycle of Germanic myth and legend which crystalized into the *Nibelungenlied*, the Indian epic tells of a bitter quarrel which developed into a war of extermination. The five sons of Pandu are unjustly deprived of their ancestral kingdom by their wicked cousins, the Kauravas, and they regain it after a tremendous battle in which all their enemies and most of their friends are slain.

Echoes of a heroic age are heard throughout the narrative portions of the epic, and the martial values of bravery, loyalty and truthfulness are much encouraged. Heroes and villains alike never refuse challenges, whether to battle, to contests of skill, or to games of chance, and few major characters are guilty of serious cowardice. The atmosphere of the main narrative is that of a society just emerging from tribalism, in which personal loyalty to one's chief and fellow clansmen is still very strongly emphasized.

But the *Mahabharata* as we have it contains more than the poetic account of a legendary war. It is replete with interpolations of all kinds, which were obviously introduced long after the main narrative was composed.

The longest of these is the *Santi Parvan*, the twelfth of the 18 sections or books into which the epic is divided, and by no means the shortest of them. Here the slow death of the wounded Bhishma, the elder statesman of the Kauravas, is made the pretext for a long series of didactic passages on many aspects of polity, ethics and religion.

Similarly Yudhishthira, the eldest of the five heroes, is a passionate but inexpert gambler, and it is as a result of his vice that he and his brothers are forced into exile. This gives the cue for the introduction of the lengthy tale of king Nala, another addicted gambler of even older days who lost his wife and kingdom through dicing, but regained them at last after many adventures.

This interpolation, in fluent easy verse, often forms the student's first introduction to Sanskrit literature in the original. From its style and content it appears to be at least as old as the main narrative of the epic, and looks back to the days of small semi-tribal kingdoms before the time of the Buddha.

Undoubtedly the most important interpolation of the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the long religious poem which has become the most influential text of modern Hinduism. Of all works of Sanskrit literature it is probably the most widely known outside India, and it has been translated into many languages and read by millions who know nothing else of the epic poem which contains it.

A pretext for its inclusion is provided, just before the commencement of the great battle, by the misgivings of Arjuna, the second of the five heroes, at the thought of fighting his own kinsfolk and friends. His mentor Krishna strengthens Arjuna's resolution with this long religious poem, itself possibly a conflation of verses from more than one source, and reveals himself as the great God Vishnu incarnate.

Shorter interpolations are numerous, and include the well known and beautiful legend of the faithful wife Savitri, who saves her husband from the clutches of the god of death, the story of Rama, a brief summary of the other great Hindu epic, and that of Shakuntala, in a version significantly different from the plot of Kalidasa's famous drama.

These many episodes, both narrative and didactic, seem to have been incorporated into the text of the *Mahabharata* by various editors in the course of the five centuries between the Maurya and Gupta empires, from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 300. By about A.D. 500 the full epic existed in something like its present form.

A terminal date may be established from the lists of tribes and peoples which occur here and there in the text. Such lists include the Hunas (the Hephthalites or White Huns), who could hardly have been known to the Indians until about A.D. 400, when they had established themselves in Bactria, but they do not include other peoples such as the Gurjaras, who first appear on the scene in the sixth century.

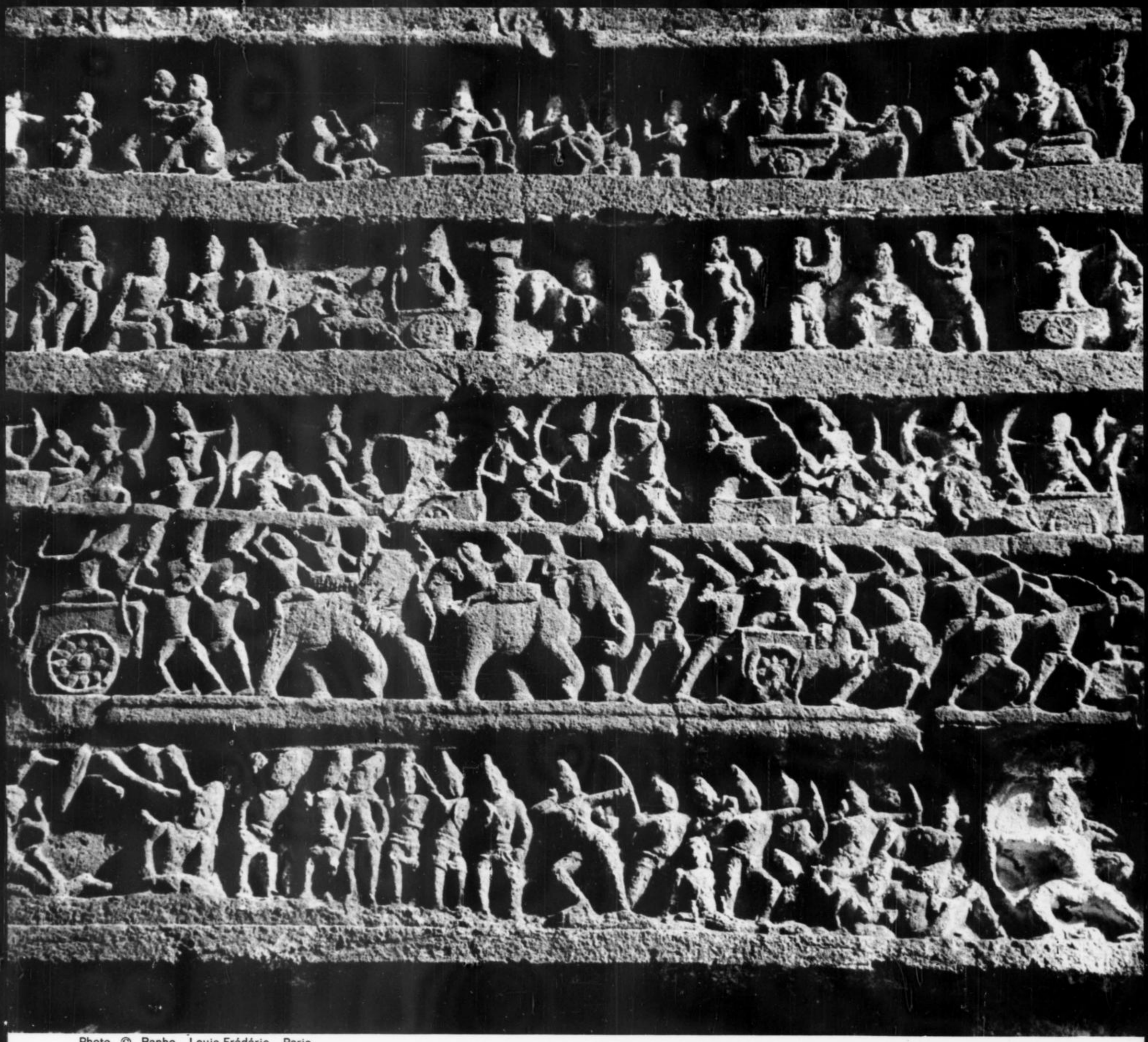

Photo © Rapho, Louis-Frédéric, Paris

Sculptured on the great rock-hewn temple of Kailasanath, at Ellora, near Bombay, this frieze portrays episodes from one of the world's most ancient epic poems, the Mahabharata. **When this bas-relief with its innumerable figures of men and animals was carved nearly 12 centuries ago, the stories and characters it depicted had already been well-known to the peoples of northern India for a thousand years.**

But, even after the closing of the canon of the text, manuscripts were subjected to many minor emendations and interpolations, and three main textual traditions of the *Mahabharata* have been traced. Now the splendid edition of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute of Poona, which has just been completed after the labour of many scholars for over forty years, has provided an established text of the epic, as it existed at the end of the Gupta period.

Thanks to the great expansion which it has undergone the *Mahabharata* is something much more than a narrative epic, though it is quite possible to extract the narrative from the many interpolations and present it as a heroic poem.

The largest single poem in the world, containing nearly 100,000 couplets or stanzas of two verses each, or about seven times the size of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined, it has aptly been described as an encyclopaedia of early Hinduism. It treats of almost every aspect of the religious, political and social life of the India of the time, viewed chiefly from the angle of the orthodox brahmin. It contains much didactic material out of which developed the *Dharmasastras*, or legal texts, and the *Puranas*, the long poems on myth, legend and religious practice which were compiled from the Gupta period onwards. Thus, even though no faith can be placed on the historicity of its story, it is of the utmost importance to the historian.

The plethora of didactic interpolations, which have expanded the poem to so unwieldy a length, have somewhat reduced its popularity. The main story is widely known among ordinary Hindus, however, and later authors have written poems, dramas and prose stories around many of its episodes, in both Sanskrit and the modern languages of India.

Abridged versions of the *Mahabharata*, omitting many of the interpolations, exist in most languages of India

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Photo Films Division, Govt. of India

MINIATURES ON FILM AND CANVAS

The Ramayana **and the** Mahabharata **have been subjects of Indian feature films for many years (see article page 43). Left, a scene from "Sandesh," a new Govt. of India cartoon film produced by J. Bhownagary to help India's Save the Food campaign, using traditional material from the** Mahabharata **for a contemporary purpose. Draupadi, left, has no food to offer except a grain on an empty plate. Krishna replies that even one grain is important. The images are the work of a young, gifted painter, R.K. Malwankar. He is known for his lovely miniatures using the thumb and fingerprint technique. The artist has successfully caught the beauty and atmosphere of 18th-century art in northern India, an example of which is shown on right. A miniature dating from 1765, it depicts an episode from the** Ramayana.

FAR INTO THE NIGHT WITH INDIA'S TROUBADORS

In India, where oral and visual tradition has been a means of transmitting knowledge for centuries, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are an enduring and inherent part of popular culture. They have found their way into every language and dialect of India and South Asia, where even poor and isolated villages have puppet shows, dramas or plays based on the epics (see pages 29 and 36). Everywhere in Indian villages and towns people love to sit in a circle and listen far into the night to the recitations and songs of these poems. Many thousands of people devote a set period each day to reading the Ramayana or Gita aloud, starting again at the beginning as soon as the end is reached since these works have almost the sanctity of the Bible among Christians.
Left and opposite, wandering minstrels sing the story of the Ramayana to audiences in Calcutta's open-air meeting ground, the Maidan. Popular paintings near musician's hand depict Rama and his wife Sita.

Photos © Georges Tcherkine, Paris

Photo © National Museum, New Delhi

TWO GREAT EPICS *(Continued from page 5)*

Mahabharata, world's longest poem —200,000 verses

and Southeast Asia, and the story of the five heroes, much adapted to local taste and tradition, is still popular in the *wayang*, the shadow theatre of Indonesia.

Few but Hindu pandits and serious students, however, have read the whole *Mahabharata* from beginning to end, even in translation, and in the form in which we have it it can never become a "popular classic." But in India it has long served as a mine of material for later authors, and it remains so to this day.

The second of the great epics, the *Ramayana*, differs from the *Mahabharata* both in theme and in character.

It tells of the righteous prince Rama, who is unjustly exiled by his father, Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya. Accompanied by his beautiful wife Sita and his loyal younger brother Lakshmana he takes refuge in the wild forests of central and southern India (see "The Exile of Rama", page 30), where the three have many adventures, the most exciting of which is the capture of Sita by Ravana, the demon king of Ceylon, and her ultimate rescue by the brothers, helped by an army of monkeys.

At last Rama regains his ancestral kingdom, but the end of the story is not altogether happy, since in order to satisfy public opinion Rama is compelled to put away Sita, who has lost her ritual purity residing in the house of another man, though in captivity she was perfectly chaste and loyal to her husband.

The *Ramayana* is an account of the marvellous adventures of an almost supernatural hero, embroidered with wonders of every kind, and written in formal courtly language. For a European parallel we should look not to the *Iliad* or even to the *Aeneid*, but to such works as Wolfram's *Parzifal* or perhaps Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.

The marvellous and supernatural elements are intensified in the first and last books, where Rama, the hero of the poem, is revealed as an incarnation of the great God Vishnu, who took human form in order to save the world from the molestations of demons. Hence, Rama is worshipped as a god to this day, and the *Ramayana* is looked on as a sacred text.

The epic has many passages of drama and pathos, and shows considerable psychological insight. It inculcates the virtues of courage, loyalty, faith, forgiveness and fellowship.

The *Ramayana* does not contain very lengthy interpolations, and in style and content it gives a much greater sense of unity than does the *Mahabharata*. Moreover, its length is less than a quarter of that of the other epic. The composition is more literary in character, and many similes and metaphors suggest classical courtly Sanskrit poetry of the kind written by Kalidasa. Lengthy descriptive passages punctuate the narrative, and these include beautiful word-pictures of the seasons of the Indian year, such as became formal and regular features of the later Sanskrit *kavya* or courtly epic.

The marriage of Draupadi

The text below is taken from a children's book published in India in 1965 (1) which retells a number of stories selected from the Indian classics. This tale, "Draupadi Swayamwara", relates an episode from the Mahabharata: **a contest of skill between the Pandava and the Kaurava clans for the hand of the Princess Draupadi.**

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The Pandavas were living in Ekachakra when they heard news about the Princess Draupadi. Draupadi was the daughter of Drupada, the King of Panchala. She was the most beautiful princess of the time and was greatly talented. Kings and princes of many countries desired to marry her.

King Drupada had hoped that Draupadi would marry Arjuna, the cleverest and the most handsome among the Pandavas. But he heard, with great sorrow, of the tragic death of the Pandavas at Varanavata. Now he had to find some other suitable husband for Draupadi. There were many young princes of great name seeking her hand. But King Drupada could not make a choice. He decided to hold a swayamwara for his daughter.

Swayamwara was a kind of marriage where a princess could choose her husband from among a crowd of suitors. The suitors would be introduced to the princess one by one and she would make her own choice. Sometimes the suitors were asked to perform some difficult feat of strength or skill and he who did it first would get the princess in marriage.

A day was fixed for Draupadi's swayamwara and invitations were sent to all kings and princes. Everyone accepted and they came to the Kingdom of Panchala.

The Pandavas, still in disguise, decided to attend Draupadi's swayamwara. They went to the capital of Panchala with Kunti. There they stayed in the house of a potter.

On the day of the swayamwara, the Pandavas left Kunti in the potter's house and went to the palace. They went there not as princes but as Brahmins and took their seats among the visitors.

The kings and princes had arrived hoping to win the hand of Draupadi. There were distinguished warriors among them. The Kauravas, confident of winning the princess, were also there.

The large marriage hall was beautifully decorated. The guests took their seats. King Drupada and his son escorted Draupadi to the hall. Everyone stood up and looked eagerly at the most beautiful princess they had ever seen.

King Drupada then said that Draupadi would marry any man of noble birth who could string a bow kept in the hall and shoot at a target. The bow was huge and heavy. The target was a little metal fish very high above the ground inside a disc with holes that kept turning round and round. A vessel of water was kept on the ground below the target and the suitor had to shoot at the fish by looking at its image in the water.

It was an almost impossible task. But the kings and princes were eager to compete, for each wanted to win Draupadi. One by one they got up and went to the mighty bow to try their luck. Many could not lift it. Some could lift it but were unable to string it. The most famous among them were able to lift the bow and string it but failed to shoot at the fish.

There was disappointment on the face of King Drupada. People looked at each other in dismay muttering that it was an impossible feat.

Then Arjuna stood up from among the crowd of Brahmins, and walked towards the bow. Everybody looked at

(1) "Tales from Indian Classics". Book 1 retold by Savitri, illustrated by Pulak Biswas. © Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, 1965.

The account of Rama's exile, for example, contains many fine passages of natural description, as when Rama describes the season of the rains:

"See how much lovelier now the [forests are,
green from the constant rain, and gay [with dancing peacocks.
The roaring clouds, weary with loads [of water,
rest on the peaks, escorted by the [cranes,
which, flying in line, rejoicing in the [clouds,
seem like a chain of lotuses, wind- [blown across the sky.
Green grass and flowers cover the [warm earth,
like a lady wrapped in a many-coloured [blanket." (1)

Successive editors introduced material from many sources into the narrative of the *Mahabharata*, which, despite its ascription to a single author, the sage Vyasa, and its generally correct Sanskrit, has something of the anonymity of folk-literature about it. The *Ramayana* is also ascribed to a single author, the sage Valmiki, who is introduced in the first and last of the poem's seven cantos as a contemporary of the hero, and as the protector of the pregnant Sita when she is cast out by her husband.

But the *Ramayana* is also clearly the work of more than one author, though its structure is not so bewilderingly complex as that of the longer epic. The style of the first and last cantos is significantly different from that of the central five. These five cantos can stand alone as a complete story and have no real need of the other two. Except for a few obvious interpolations, they treat Rama as a mortal hero, whereas in the first and last cantos he is wholly divine, the full incarnation of the great God Vishnu.

There are many other arguments which prove with virtual certainty that at least two and probably three hands have contributed to the poem in its final form. But the most important part of the story is the work of one man, a conscious poet far more sophisticated and sensitive than the nameless composers of the *Mahabharata*.

Since a synopsis of the *Ramayana* story occurs in the *Mahabharata* it seems that the former was in existence before the process of adding interpolations to the latter came to an end. Nevertheless the *Ramayana* seems more recent than the *Mahabharata* narrative, and its central portion may have been composed no later than about the beginning of our era. The capital city of the Kurus, Hastinapura, on which the story of the *Mahabharata* centres, is in the western part of the Ganga basin, some fifty miles to the north of modern Delhi (1). Ayodhya, the capital of Rama, is in eastern Uttar Pradesh, and the western part of the sub-continent plays little part in the *Ramayana* story.

In the *Mahabharata* the Deccan and

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

(1) Translated by the author.

(1) Editor's note. — The site of Hastinapura has recently bean excavated. Romila Thapar writes in **A History of India,** *"a part of it was found to have been washed away in about 800 B.C. by the flooding of the river Ganges. This incident is referred to in the* **Puranas** *as having occurred in the reign of the seventh successor to the king ruling at Hastinapura immediately after the [Mahabharata] war, which would suggest c. 900 B.C. as the approximate date for the war."*

Photo © Luc Ionesco, Paris

This extraordinary scene is only a tiny portion of a gigantic 160-foot bas-relief at Angkor Wat recounting episodes from the Mahabharata. **It depicts the combat between the Pandavas and the Kauravas (see also photo p. 19). The** Mahabharata, **Gandhi wrote, demonstrates the futility of war, and the field of battle is our own body: "To one who reads the spirit of the** Gita **(a part of the** Mahabharata**) it teaches the spirit of non-violence, the secret of realizing the self through the physical body."**

him and wondered how a Brahmin dare attempt a feat which was beyond all the heroic kings and princes. But Arjuna confidently picked up the bow, stringed it, and shot five arrows one after the other at the target. The fish fell to the ground.

There was jubilation among the crowd.. Draupadi looked at the splendid youth and garlanded him. Some of the kings and princes did not like the idea of a Brahmin winning the hand of a princess. They wanted to start a fight but others said that the princess was fairly won.

Arjuna and his brothers went back to the potter's house to tell their mother of the happy event. It was night when they reached the house. Arjuna knocked at the door and shouted to Kunti : "Mother, I have won a wonderful prize." Kunti replied from inside : "Share it with all your brothers." And then she came out and saw what the prize was. "My sons", said Kunti, "I cannot take back what I have said and so Draupadi shall be the wife of all." Draupadi became the common wife of all the brothers.

King Drupada was not happy at the Swayamwara. He did not know who the young man was.. Was he really a Brahmin? Or was he somebody who was disguised as a Brahmin? He wanted to find out. He sent a spy to the potter's house. The spy returned and informed the king that the Pandavas were not dead and it was Arjuna who had won the hand of Draupadi.

Drupada was filled with joy. He sent messengers to invite the Pandavas to the palace but he did not tell them that he knew their secret. When the Pendavas arrived clad in the clothes of simple sadhus, the king received them with great honour. He requested them to tell him who they really were. Dharmaputra then told Drupada the whole story.

The news that the Pandavas were alive reached the Kauravas. On the advice of Vidura, Bhishma, Drona and other respected elders, King Dhritarashtra asked the Pandavas to return home. The Pandavas and the Kauravas then made peace between themselves. They divided the country into two parts, one half to be ruled by the Pandavas and the other by the Kauravas.

The Pandavas set up their capital at Indraprastha and the Kauravas at Hastinapura.

Ramayana, a living ideal down the ages

the Dravidian south of India are little mentioned, except in lists of places and peoples which have obviously been worked over in the course of the centuries in which the epic developed. In the *Ramayana* these regions, as well as Ceylon, play an essential part in the story, though they are looked on as shadowy and wild lands, chiefly the abode of demons and of monkeys which talk and act like men.

The court of Dasaratha in the *Ramayana* is that of a typical Hindu ruler of classical times, not that of a chieftain such as we meet in the *Mahabharata* story, who is merely the first among his unruly peers. Though the Hindu tradition places Rama many thousands of years before the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* reflects a much more developed phase of Hindu culture than does the *Mahabharata* narrative.

A strange and very tame version of the story preserved in the traditions of Theravada Buddhism suggests that there actually was, sometime in the centuries before Buddha's birth, a king named Dasaratha whose righteous son Rama was wrongly exiled but in the end regained his birthright.

But the exciting account of the capture of Sita by Ravana and her ultimate rescue finds no place in the Buddhist version, and this suggests that the *Ramayana*, like so many heroic tales of ancient and medieval times, is a conflation from more than one source, and that some of the most dramatic parts of the finished story had no place in the original tale. "It is, like the *Mahabharata*, a legend, not a piece of sober history, or even the reflection of the historical process of the Aryanization of the Deccan."

Much work has now been done in unravelling the skeins of medieval European stories such as those of the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Chanson de Roland*, both of which have been shown to have no reliable historical content; and there is no reason why the Indian epics should be more historically trustworthy than their European counterparts. They are far more than mere historical narratives; rather they are among the greatest poems in the world's literature, and as such they have inspired countless millions of people for some two thousand years.

The *Ramayana* has impressed itself even more deeply than the *Mahabharata* upon the soul of Hindu India. It has been translated, or more often freely paraphrased, in almost every Indian language, and in most of the languages of South-East Asia. These versions have adapted the story of Rama to the local cultures, and made it part of the local traditions. It has been heard repeatedly by many generations of illiterate peasants, who not only have been thrilled by its stirring and often touching story, but also have been taught the virtues of love, forebearance, obedience, courage and truthfulness from it.

Rama has long formed the ideal of Hindu manhood, as Sita has of Hindu womanhood. Rama is invariably obedient and respectful to his parents, loving and protective towards Sita, loyal and affectionate to his relatives and friends, humbly reverent to gods, priests and sages, benevolent and gentle towards his subjects, just and forgiving to his enemies. The obedience and deference which Sita shows to her husband and her husband's family know no bounds, but she possesses intense courage, and is ready to stake her life in defence of her virtue.

THE story of Rama has long been part of the cultural tradition of Buddhist Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. The Muslim Indonesians and Malays, who imported the *Ramayana* from India long before their conversion to Islam, still delight in the ancient Hindu story, adapted slightly to meet the theological requirements of their religion and the different cultural milieu of the Southeast Asian archipelago. The Muslim tradition of India and Pakistan, however, seems to have rejected the ancient legends in their entirety, though in the days of the Mughals Persian paraphrases of both epics were made.

There can be no doubt that the enduring popularity of the two epics has been largely due to the fact that both were adapted at a very early period to the needs of Vaishnava Hinduism. According to the orthodox formulation Vishnu, the High God from whom all creation sprang, has fully incarnated himself nine times in mortal form for the salvation of the world, and will incarnate himself a tenth time at the end of this aeon, in order to restore the age of gold. Of the ten incarnations of Vishnu those most widely revered are Rama and Krishna, the former the hero of the *Ramayana* and the latter one of the main characters of the *Mahabharata*.

Thus the epics of India have become holy books, forming a sort of New Testament to the older, less directly appealing, Vedic literature. Unlike the Vedas, which were intended only for the menfolk of the higher classes, especially the brahmins, the epics might be heard, read and learnt by anyone, even by women, children and untouchables. Thus their influence on the religious life of India has been in the long run far greater than that of the Vedas and Upanishads.

The devotees of Krishna have several other classical texts, notably the *Harivamsa* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, with which to sustain their faith. On the other hand, for those who prefer to worship God in the form of Rama the *Ramayana* in its many translations and paraphrases has become a sort of Bible.

The Hindi *Ramayan* of Tulsi Das was the only religious text to impress Mahatma Gandhi in his boyhood, and with his last breath he called upon God by the name of Rama. Another great source of his inspiration was the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which forms part of the *Mahabharata*.

Some Indians of later generations may feel that many of the moral precepts of both epics are hardly applicable to present conditions, and may have doubts about the theology which they reflect, but, whatever their future as sources of religious inspiration, these texts have so deeply affected the heart of Hindu culture and are of such high merit as literature that they can never be forgotten.

The non-Hindu who wishes to understand the culture of Hindu India and the basic values and attitudes of Hinduism cannot do better than read these poems. From the point of view of modern "western" taste, their literary value may be enhanced by judicious abridgement.

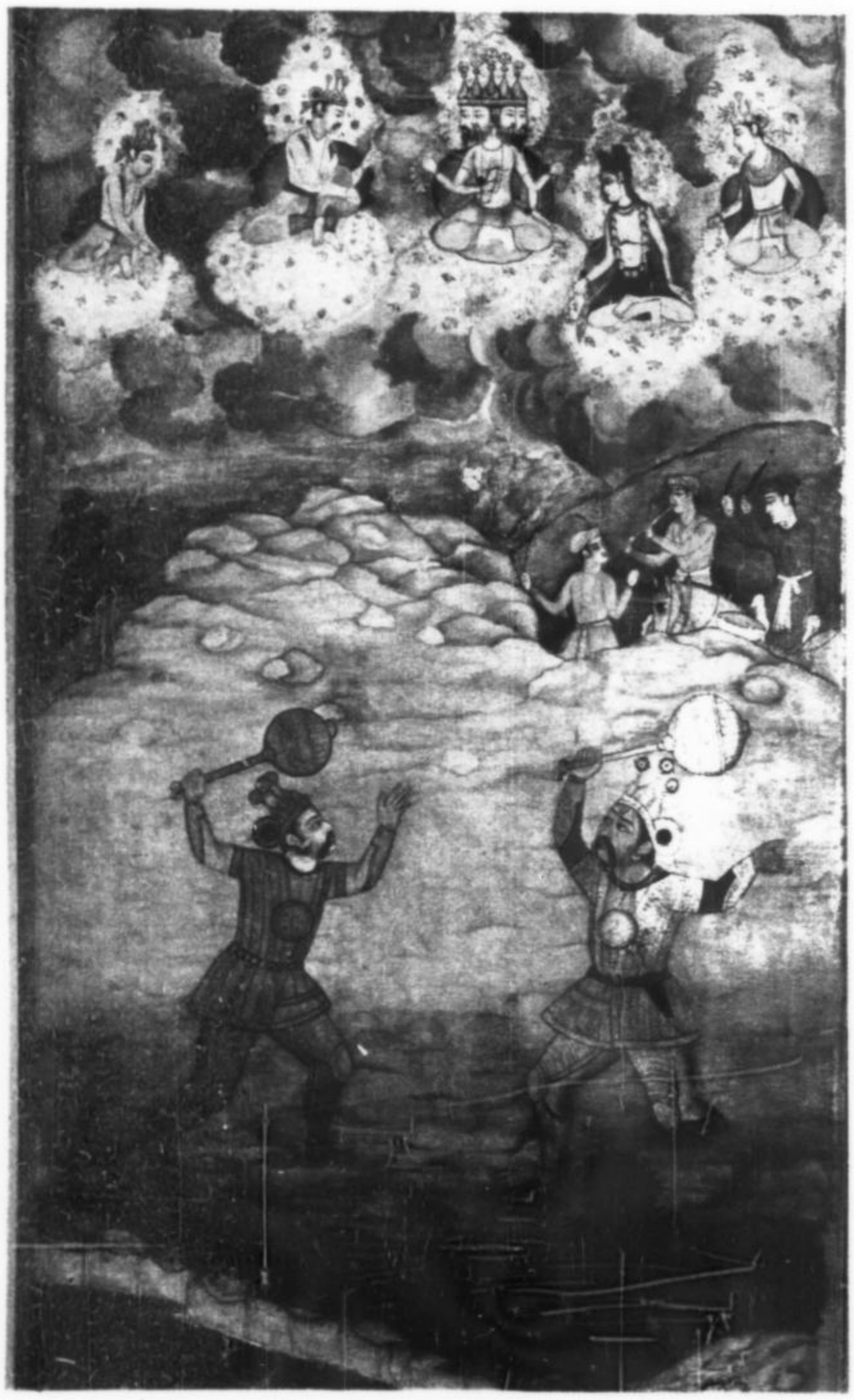
It is unfortunate that so far little has been done to introduce the Indian epics to the contemporary non-Indian reader, for, though full translations of both exist in English and several other European languages, none of these has been made in a style which conveys to the twentieth-century reader the forceful narrative of the *Mahabharata* or the subtle dialogue and fine descriptive writing of the *Ramayana*.

Good abridged translations of both poems in modern idiom are needed to bring something of their grandeur and beauty to a wider circle of readers, in the lands where their stories are not traditionally known.

DAMAYANTI THE BEAUTIFUL

Narratives of romance and tragedy, well-springs of philosophy and moral precepts, the epics of ancient India are also works of splendid descriptive poetry which with lyric sparkle often evoke the charms of nature: the grace and mysteries of the world of animals and an infinite variety of living, growing things. Painters and sculptors of many lands have thus found in them an unceasing source of inspiration. This painting, the work of an 18th-century artist, illustrates a Persian translation of the Mahabharata. **It shows the beautiful Damayanti, who won the heart of the gracious Prince Nala, resting in her garden on a summer day. The story of the trials and tribulations of Damayanti and her lover is told in one of the finest and best known poems of the** Mahabharata.

Photo © Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris



THE COLLECTIVE DREAM OF A CONTINENT

by Anil de Silva

Colour page

Top: Bhishma, in the Mahabharata **(centre figure) expiring on the field of battle while Krishna, holding a lotus flower, listens to his dying words. When Bhishma asks for water, Arjuna shoots an arrow into the earth and brings forth a sparkling spring to quench Bhishma's thirst. This 19th-century painting decorates a Vishnuite manuscript of episodes from the** Mahabharata **compiled in Kashmir.**

Photo Paul Almasy © Private collection, Paris

Left: A 17th-century Persian illustration (Mughal school) for a translation of the Mahabharata. **It depicts the combat between the powerful Bhima and the wicked Duryodhana on a bare hillside. Dominating the scene are the Gods of the Indian Pantheon, among them Indra, God of the sky and storms and Yama, God of the underworld.**

Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Right: The Ramayana **is rich in descriptive passages that bring vividly to life the landscapes of India in all their seasonal change. In one of them an Indian artist of the 17th-century may have found inspiration for this charming miniature showing Rama and Sita travelling in their chariot through a luxuriant land.**

Photo © Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* though born in India, belong to the "collective dream" of all of South East Asia. The epics are reborn at every age, their message renewed, their forms changing as the course of history changes, fructifying and revifiying and filling the human spirit. They have charmed and enchanted, inspired and exalted the people of India and South Asia, forming the very foundation of their rich and living culture.

The epics are history, myth and folklore, and the ageless quality of their appeal, the influence of the moral, ethical and religious values they contain have shaped the daily lives of millions of men and women for generations.

It has often been said that "what is not in the *Mahabharata* is nowhere." Mahatma Gandhi, who wrote at length on the meaning and import of the two great epic poems and translated the *Bhagavad-Gita* (which is a part of the *Mahabharata)* into his native Gujarati, once said: "The *Gita* has become for us a spiritual reference book... the deeper you dive into it the richer the meanings you get."

Later he wrote: "Early in childhood I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve as an unfailing guide through the temptations of life... I learned Sanskrit to enable me to read the *Gita.* Today the *Gita* is not only my Bible or my Koran it is my Mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago, but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom." ("Gita the Mother" by M.K. Gandhi.)

The *Ramayana* is an epic poem of love and beauty and tells the story of the princely hero, Rama, who fights a battle to bring back his kidnapped wife, Sita, from the demon king of Lanka (Ceylon). The *Mahabharata* is the story of the Great Civil War which rent India about 1,000 B.C., a terrible fratricidal war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the sons of two brothers, and fought on the northern plains of Kurukshetra, in the region of Delhi.

Both epics were transmitted orally for centuries before being written down, but even today wandering minstrels and ballad singers travel regularly from village to village throughout India and other countries of South Asia reciting and singing the epics far into the night under the stars. Indian working-men, wearied with the toil of the day, are capable of spending a whole night seated in a circle round the fire listening attentively to a drama of three thousand years ago.

To the central themes of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* have been grafted a multitude of subsidiary stories to illustrate the central themes. Their heroes find prominent mention in the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ANIL DE SILVA *of Ceylon has spent many years of study on the art and literature of India and Asia. She is the author of "The Life of Buddha" (Phaidon Press, London, 1957) and "Chinese Landscape Paintings in the Tun-Huang Caves" (Methuen and Co., London; Crown Publishers, New York), both of which have appeared in several language editions. Her latest book, "India: Conquest and Freedom" (New York Graphic Society) will appear shortly. Anil de Silva is co-editor with Prof. Otto von Simson of "Man Through His Art", the series of art albums sponsored by the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession with Unesco aid.*

Endless variations on a theme

Indian and South Asian literature of all ages from the fifth century onwards.

Both epics constitute a veritable treasure-house of Indian and South Asian lore, both secular and religious, and give as do no other single works an insight into the innermost depths of the soul of the people. Both works are great as a collection of stories, great as epic poems describing in magnificent language various emotions and events, great as manuals of law and morality, great as a record of social and political philosophy, and great as sacred treatises pointing the way to an understanding of the supreme ends of life.

Hajime Nakamura, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Tokyo University has written: "In the epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* the typical heroes of India are not national heroes in the sense of any national and racial consciousness, which they, as well as their authors, lacked. Ancient Indians preached as a virtue the offering of one's property, even one's life if necessary, for the sake of others' happiness. But they were never taught self-sacrifice for a particular nation or race. The concept of the national hero in our sense did not appear in Indian history." (1)

THE numerous variant tales incorporated into the main story of the *Mahabharata* are mainly related when the Pandavas are exiled into the forest after Yudhishthira loses his kingdom in a game of dice. Many sages come to visit them there and recount stories and legends of the past. Over the centuries, many of these tales have been taken up again by hundreds upon hundreds of writers, rewritten and modified, and used for plays and stories and poems.

Among the most important works inspired by the *Mahabharata* was that written in the 5th century by the Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa, undoubtedly the greatest poet dramatist of India's Classical Age, and often referred to as the "Indian Shakespeare." The play, called *Abhijnana-Shakuntalam*, relates a love intrigue in the king's harem (first translation into English in 1789). The verses are simply enchanting. Goethe wrote about it, "flowers and fruit, all that delights and all that sustains, all heaven and all earth, are expressed in the name of Shakuntala."

Another play inspired by the *Mahabharata* was written by Rabindranath Tagore for his famous *Chitra*. It takes as its theme an episode about Arjuna, the great hero of the Pandava brothers clan. The play is located in Assam where Arjuna is said to have stayed for some time.

There are uncounted versions of the *Ramayana*. Every language of India has its own *Ramayana*. The three most famous Indian versions, however, are the Sanskrit, attributed to Valmiki and written about 300 B.C.; the sixteenth century Hindi version by Tulsi Das; and the ninth century Tamil classic by Kamban.

Perhaps the most beautiful rendering into English is the *Ayodhya Canto* of the Kamban version, the most dramatic part of the *Ramayana*, translated by C. Rajagopalachari, and published in 1961 in the Unesco Collection of Representative Works (a chapter of the poem is given on page 30). Tulsi Das's version has also been translated into English by F.R. Allchin in the same Unesco Collection under the title *Kavitavali* (both books by George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London). It contains some of the poet's most highly personal and profound expressions of devotion to Rama.

Valmiki's Sanskrit poem is filled with lyrical descriptions of Nature. Rama and Lakshmana are tricked into leaving Sita unprotected in the forest and when they return they find her vanished. She has been kidnapped by Ravana. Rama, in his despair, runs madly from thicket to thicket calling Sita's name. In each ray of sunlight, in each golden flower, he thinks he recognizes her yellow robe.

Invoking the trees he cries: "Sweet Kadambara, have you seen my fair one? Speak, Basil, you must know, for her limbs are like your graceful branches..... Sweet Tila, fairest of all, where is she who loved your flowers? Gentle deer, has she played with you? Is your moon-faced friend hiding behind some tree? Have pity. Speak to me..... Where are her soft limbs, her moon bright face, her shapely neck, her red lips..." (2) and Rama throws himself upon the bare earth in despair.

Later, wandering in the forest, Rama and Lakshmana come to the grove by the Pampa Lake. It is Spring and "Rama and Laskhmana bathe in the crystal waters of the Pampa ablaze with white and red lotus buds. The trees are proudly crowned with flowers along the banks and long creepers fall from them laden with blossoms. Screaming parrots make shrill music and Rama feels his whole being filled with langorous desire for Sita.

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(2) This and the following quotations from Valmiki's "Ramayana" come from an unpublished adaptation of the "Ramayana" by Anil de Silva and Lilian Lassen.

One of the dramatic episodes in the Ramayana **is the abduction by Ravana, the demon-king of Ceylon, of Sita, wife of Rama exiled in the forest. Rama is lured into the forest in pursuit of a deer (a demon in disguise), and his brother Lakshmana, guarding Sita, is tricked into leaving her. Ravana then appears, sweeps Sita off in his aerial chariot, as seen in painting below. A great vulture, Jatayu, tries to rescue her and though mortally wounded lives long enough to tell Rama of Sita's abduction. Jatayu's combat with Ravana is depicted in this miniature from the Punjab Hills school of painting, dating from about 1765.**

Photo © National Museum, New Delhi

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(1) "Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples" by Hajime Nakamura, edited by Philip P. Wiener (East-West Center Press, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1964). Originally published by the Japanese National Commission for Unesco in 1960.

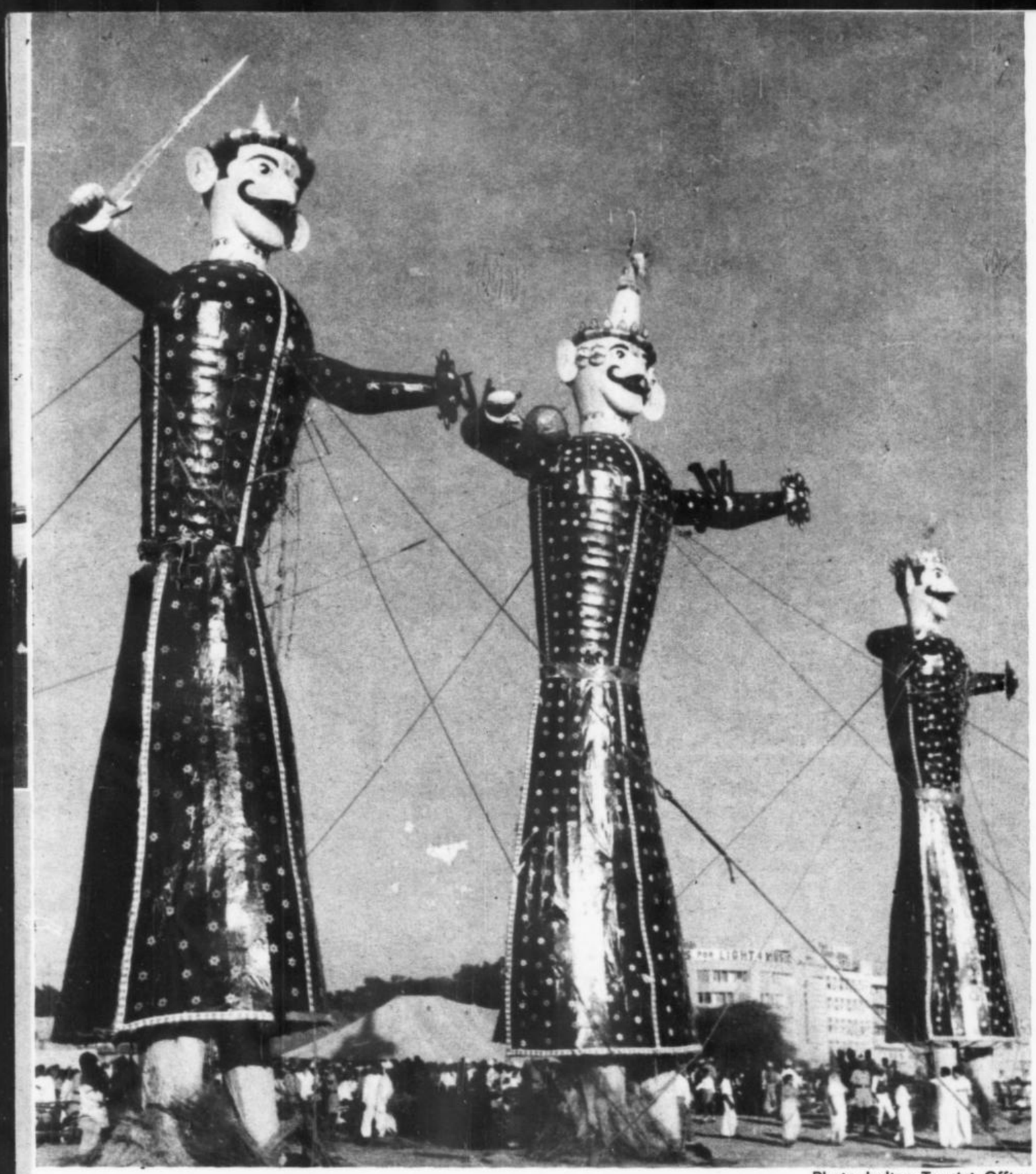
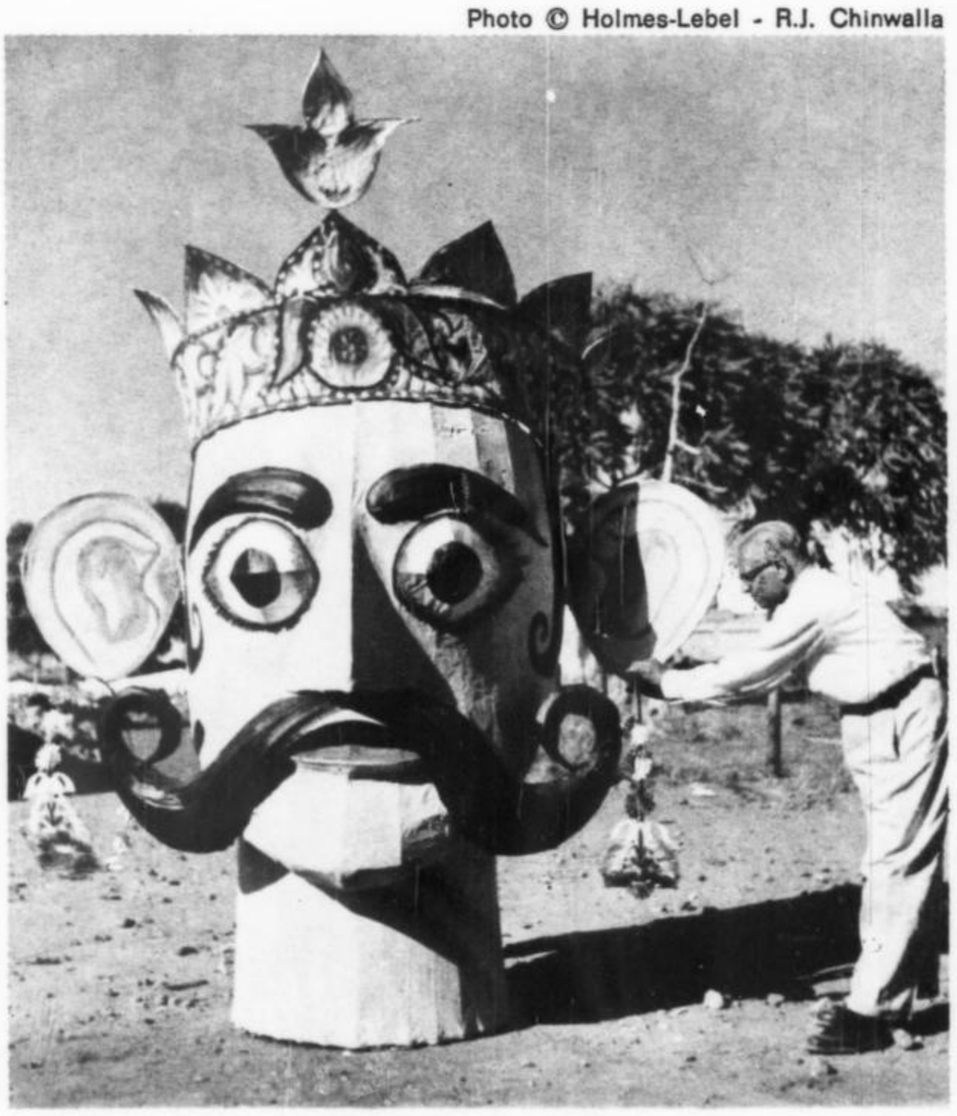


Photo Indian Tourist Office

THE FESTIVAL OF DUSSERAH

Photo © Holmes-Lebel - R.J. Chinwalla



The three colossal figures dwarfing the ordinary mortals at their feet (above) are pasteboard effigies of the principal demons of the Ramayana**—ten-headed Ravana (centre) flanked by Meghdana and Khumbhakarna. They figure in the celebration of the Indian festival of Dusserah. After celebrations dedicated to the Goddess Durga who helped Rama against Ravana, giant effigies, like those above erected in a northern Indian city, meet a fiery fate when flaming arrows shot by Rama ignite explosives packed inside them. Right, putting last touches to a figure's head.**

"Look, brother, the Kakila birds mock me with their joyful notes and the yellow clusters of the cassias awake my longing for Sita; the Mango tree, breaking into flower, is like a gaily dressed lover; the wild cock calls to his mate near the waterfall, my darling heard his shrill notes at dawn one day in our cottage. From tree to tree each bird seeks his mate, filling the air with their triumph and the call of the Spring is unbearable. My eyes are tortured for a sight of Sita.

"Amid the bamboo thickets the peacock dances in frantic glee, his tail glowing like a jewelled window in the sun; the peahen answers her mate in his amorous dance and he pursues her through the tangled grass, no demon has robbed him of his love! Look, Lakshmana, at this butterfly whose wings are covered with the golden pollen of the flowers he has kissed. In this month the cup of my widowed grief is full. I cannot bear the loss of her, the long sleepless nights without her.

"Somewhere under alien skies it must be Spring too, and my imprisoned love mourns for me. My spirit knows she can never live without me. Every gentle breeze that stirs the blossoms on the trees fans the fury of my desires..... Where are you, Sita, my fawn-eyed love?" Rama wanders through the wood calling desperately for his lost love.

THE ardent zest for nature seen in these extracts goes back to a continuous tradition and is the supreme expression of an essentially Indian experience. All nature's exuberance, the cries of the Kokila, the wind, the sun, the moon, the heat, the rainclouds, the Mango trees, the bee, the vine, the curve of a pitcher, the dark indigo-starred sky at night, all are caressed by the poet and nature's vitality expresses and symbolizes love, here expressed by Rama for Sita. The especial place the *Ramayana* holds in the hearts of the people of India and South Asia is due mainly to the purity of the hero and heroine who incarnate the ideals of conjugal love and fidelity.

How revealing is this description of Sita as a prisoner: "Ravana woke to a new day to the strains of music as the solemn hymn of praise to the dawn was sung. The thought of Sita came to his heart, he could not control the passion that absorbed his soul. Laying aside his bow and arrow, he put on a spotless white robe embroidered with flowers and gold and entered the Asoka grove impatient to see her. A sudden fear and trembling took hold of Sita when she saw Ravana in his pride; she folded her arms over her breasts trying to screen their beauty from his bold and amorous glances. She lay prone like a severed branch on the earth, her thoughts flying to Rama to give her courage."

Valmiki's *Ramayana* has Ravana as the villain, but in South India and the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

HANUMAN, LEADER OF THE MONKEYS, BELOVED BY MILLIONS

Animals occupy a leading place in the Indian epics, notably in the Ramayana in which they are treated as humans and often deified. Monkeys are a symbol of fidelity, and the loyalty shown to Rama by Hanuman is proverbial. Right, a painting of Hanuman with Rama and Sita in his heart, an example of the Kalighat "pop" art which bazaar artists of Kalighat, Calcutta began to produce early in the 19th-century for mass sale to pilgrims who thronged the Kalighat temple. It has been claimed that Kalighat painting "anticipated by a century or more cubism and impressionism."

Photo courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Hunaman is widely worshipped in South Asia. In memory of his services to Rama, monkeys are held sacred. In Indian cities they boldly roam about streets and public parks. Here a playful monkey tests a bell at Temple of Monkeys in Calcutta, as a stoic stone lion chews his tail.

Photo © Tony Saulnier, Paris

HANUMAN was the most powerful of the monkey chiefs. Hanuman's loyalty to Rama has become proverbial, and he is held up as the symbol of faithfulness and self-surrender.

When Rama on his return to Ayodhya asked Hanuman what boon he desired as a reward for his great service, the faithful monkey only asked for permission to live so long as the story of Rama would be told in this world. The boon was granted and it is believed that Hanuman still lives in some inaccessible mountain.

In the "Mahabharata" is an interesting account of a meeting between Hanuman and his half-brother Bhima (Bhima was born of Kunti by the power of Pavana, the wind-god).

After Rama's death, Hanuman was living in a mountain fastness spending his days in contemplation of his great master. Bhima, in his search for a mythical flower Draupadi wished to possess, happened to pass this forest and saw an old monkey sleeping across his path. He haughtily asked the monkey to get out of his way.

The monkey wished to know who he was. Bhima gave a boastful account of himself and the greatness of the Pandava heroes; upon this, the monkey asked him how such wonderful people happened to wander in the forests without a kingdom and how the beloved wife of such heroes was suffered to be insulted by Duryodana.

Bhima disdained to make answer but asked the monkey to clear the road. The monkey said that he was ailing and requested Bhima to step across him. But Bhima would not do this because, he said, of his respect for his brother Hanuman who was a monkey. Nor would he pass him by the head side.

After some argument Bhima agreed to pass by the tailside, but as he started to pass the tail this appendage of the monkey began to lengthen. After walking along the tail for about

a league Bhima decided to lift it up with his club, which weapon, however, broke in the attempt.

Now the Pandava knew he was dealing with no ordinary ape and he came back to Hanuman and asked him respectfully who he was. Hanuman smiled and disclosed his identity. He entertained Bhima with many tales of ancient days, and described to him the feats performed by the monkeys in the "Ramayana" battle.

Bhima requested Hanuman to show him the form he had assumed for jumping over to Lanka. Hanuman now stood up and began to increase in size; but before he reached his full stature Bhima got frightened of the enormity of the form, fainted and fell down. Hanuman assumed a smaller size, revived his brother, gave him directions as to how to get the flower he was seeking and sent him on his adventurous task.

Hanuman was famous not only for his physical strength but also for his learning. "The chief of the monkeys," says the "Ramayana", "is perfect: no one equals him in the Shastras, in learning, and in ascertaining the sense of scriptures. In all sciences, in the rules of austerity, he rivals the preceptor of the gods."

Hanuman is widely worshipped in India. In memory of his services to Rama, monkeys are held sacred. In many Indian cities they boldly roam about streets and public parks.

From: "Epics. Myths and Legends of India" by P. Thomas. Copyright held by D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Bombay, India.

Rama—symbol of love and chivalry

Jain versions, Ravana is the great tragic figure for his love for Sita carries with it his own death; he catches our imagination and the idea that his passion bears its inevitable disaster follows the spirit of Greek tragedy.

The main school of Jain poetry follows the poet Vimalasuri (whose Sanskrit version was written round the first or second century A.D.) and probably contains one of the richest Ramite literatures to be found in Sanskrit, Kanerese and in the dialects. Vimalasuri makes Ravana beautiful: "Shining, dark brown body, his face like a full-blown lotus, large chested, powerful long arms, waist slender and hips like that of a lion, thighs like the trunk of an elephant. . . ."

The first non-Indian version of the *Ramayana* was produced in Chinese and dates from about the fifth century. In Tibet, Nepal and Chinese Turkestan local versions appear to be well known from about 700 A.D. In Cambodia an inscription dated 600 A.D. tells that a sage presented the *Ramayana* to a temple and made arrangements for its recitation. We know that in the tenth century a Sanskrit scholar expounded both epics at the Cambodian court.

By the seventh century the epics were known in Assam, Thailand and Laos. Ayuthia the ancient capital of Thailand was named after Ayodhya, the capital of the kingdom of Rama. Indonesian versions, mainly based on very early Indian variants, are depicted in the shadow plays and in bas-reliefs of the temples of Panataran and Prambanan. In the Javanese versions of the *Ramayana* only the bare bones of the Indian version have been retained, the rest being the incorporation of traditional Javanese legends. The Mughal Emperor Akbar had the *Ramayana* translated into Persian during the sixteenth century, produced with magnificent miniatures (see colour photos of some Persian miniatures, pp. 11, 12).

There is no part of India or Ceylon unconcerned in some way with either one of the epics, and thousands go on yearly pilgrimages to Ramesvaram, the southernmost tip of the sub-continent, where Rama and the army of monkeys stopped before crossing over to Lanka to rescue Sita. And in Ceylon itself, Sita Eliya is said to be the Asoka Grove where Sita was kept prisoner.

The great Indian festivals of Dusserah, Divali and Navrati are linked with the *Ramayana*, while others are associated with Krishna, a god-hero of the *Mahabharata*. Divali, the festival of lights, is concerned with the return of Rama to his kingdom. Every house, cottage and hut burns its little oil lamps in celebration; painted clay images of all the characters are made, and all homes are open to guests on that day (see "Unesco Courier", April 1963).

The *Ramayana* has a special place in India and South Asia because of the purity of Rama and Sita and their love symbolizing fidelity. The ideal of chivalry in the epic corresponds to that of Europe in the Middle Ages, for Rama is the protector of the oppressed, of widows and orphans; he is the perfect knight valiant in face of danger, protective and tender to all women while loving Sita alone.

Many scholars have frequently found comparisons between Homer's *Iliad* and the *Ramayana* for they share the basic plot of a husband who goes forth to battle to rescue a kidnapped wife; and the story of Jatayu, the vulture, whose brother burnt his wings on going too near the sun recalls the Greek myth of Icarus.

Many other characters in the Greek and Indian epics have points in common: Agamemnon and the monkey king Sugriva, Hector and Indrajit, the son of Ravana who abducted Sita, Nestor and Hanuman. Other details recall the Bible: Hanuman and Joshua both order the sun to stop in its course; and Hanuman, like Jonah, enters the mouth of a sea monster.

MANY of the folk tales found in the *Mahabharata* and translated during the Middle Ages have become part of the legends and stories of many European and African countries. In the seventeenth century, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and other Indian texts were translated into European languages and influenced many European and American thinkers and philosophers, writers and artists: Beethoven, Schopenhauer, Emerson, Freud, Thoreau, Whitman, Rodin, and in more recent times, the Irish poet Yeats and Aldous Huxley among others. Goethe borrowed an Indian stage convention from Kalidasa's drama *Shakuntala* (which had been translated into German) for his own prologue to *Faust*.

The extraordinary richness of the two epics accounts for the unbounded popularity they have enjoyed for centuries in India and South Asia and the joy and pleasure they continue to afford to millions today. Although the epics deal with mythical beings, animals, demons, gods and men, all these characters endear themselves to us; they are never all bad or all good. Whether these figures from the remote past come from the epics of Vyasa or Valmiki "they are the everlasting oracles of life; they have to be questioned anew with every age, each age approaching them with its own variety of understanding. . . . to learn, to evoke fresh speech from them and understand that speech."

THE EPICS IN THE ART OF SOUTH ASIA

by B.N. Goswamy

On the walls of countless Indian homes today hang inexpensive prints with illustrations of Rama subduing the ocean, or Krishna delivering his celebrated sermon to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, and before them the householders offer daily worship, much as they repair with devotion to the crowded open air grounds where the traditional festivals and the ritual dance, the *Ramalila*, are annually performed.

In the Himalayan hill district of Chamba, young girls patiently embroider scenes from the *Mahabharata* on muslin pieces which they will take with them as dowry at the time of their wedding. The heroic figures of Arjuna and Bhima and Kunti move about, with the same agility with which they did several hundred years ago, in the Indonesian shadow theatre, the *Wayang-Purwa*. In Thailand the ancient masked play, the *Khon*, still relies principally on themes from the story of *Rama*.

All this adds up to the marvellous phenomenon of not merely the survival of the two great Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as vital elements in living cultures, but also of the arts, at least those among them which are folk-based, continuing to find inspiration in themes that come from across several centuries.

The epics run like a thread through time and space. In our time and day the emotion may be wearing a little thin, but the social and moral values enshrined in these stories still sustain vast multitudes.

B. N. GOSWAMY *is a world authority on Indian and Asian art. Professor of Art History, department of Fine Arts, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India, he is the author of many studies on Indian art, including "Glimpses of Mughal Architecture" (Bengal Govt., Calcutta, 1953); "Designs of Orissa Temples" (Thacker and Co., Calcutta, 1950) and "Indian Temple Sculpture" (Lalit Kala Akademy, Delhi, 1956).*

It was quite natural for the sculptors and painters of South Asia to have turned to works which were so interwoven with life and affected so profoundly the minds and the spirit of generations of men and women. But they turned to them also because it was meritorious, conducive to *dharma* (1) and emancipation, to treat of Gods and their deeds; and again because in them they found a treasure of heroic tales that could be told with love and care.

The *Ramayana* has a wonderfully rich narrative in itself, while the *Mahabharata* is a veritable encyclopaedia. The epics are *everywhere* in the art of India and South-East Asia. So enormous, in fact, is the body of works of art devoted to themes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, that one can hope only to treat briefly of the most significant among them.

It is difficult to speak with certainty of the exact period the earliest representations of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* in the arts belong to, for much has been claimed by time. But they appear to come from the very beginning of the time when Hindu themes started finding consistent expression at the hands of the Indian sculptor.

The artist of the Gupta age (320-600 A.D.), the classical period of Indian history, turned his attention alike to Buddhist and Hindu themes, and an early, fifth-century relief from the Garhwal region, a beautifully realized treatment of the battle between Bhima and Jarasandha, ushers us into a period of great achievement.

It is to this period that that chaste monument, the Gupta temple of Deogarh in Central India, belongs. Of this gem of Hindu architecture, popularly called the Dasavatara temple with reference to the ten incarnations of Vishnu to whom the shrine is dedicated, the entire basement was once decorated with a continuous frieze representing events from the *Ramayana*.

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(1) A word used in all the Indian languages with a rich connotation of duty, right conduct, justice, order, natural, and essential quality.

Only a small fragment of this sculptured frieze has survived, but what exists is deeply moving. In these reliefs is mirrored the classical Gupta ideal of balance and harmony. The voluptuous grace of the figures, the quality of movement in the compositions, do not interfere in the slightest with the tone of noble restraint which characterizes the art of this period.

The sculptor appears to be in complete command both of his material and his emotion, and whether he is showing the deliverance of Ahalya (turned to stone by her husband for being unfaithful) when Rama's feet touched her, or Rama, Lakshmana and Sita leading a life of contented austerity in the forest, there is a quality of quiet sweetness in his art. There is no effusion, no overstatement.

The same grace and refinement belong to the work of the Pallava sculptors of the South, but to these are added a new quality of dynamism. Thirty-five miles south of Madras, at Mahabalipuram, stand the remarkable seventh-century rock-cut temples named after the Pandava heroes of the *Mahabharata;* but what towers above everything else here is the massive granite boulder on the sea-shore that presents a marvellous aspect of energy and imagination.

The entire face of this enormous piece of living rock has been carved to represent a scene of epic grandeur. The theme is a matter of some controversy among scholars, but whether it is the Descent of the Ganges from Heaven, or the story of Arjuna's penance, the source of the episode is the *Mahabharata*.

The familiar figures of the heroes

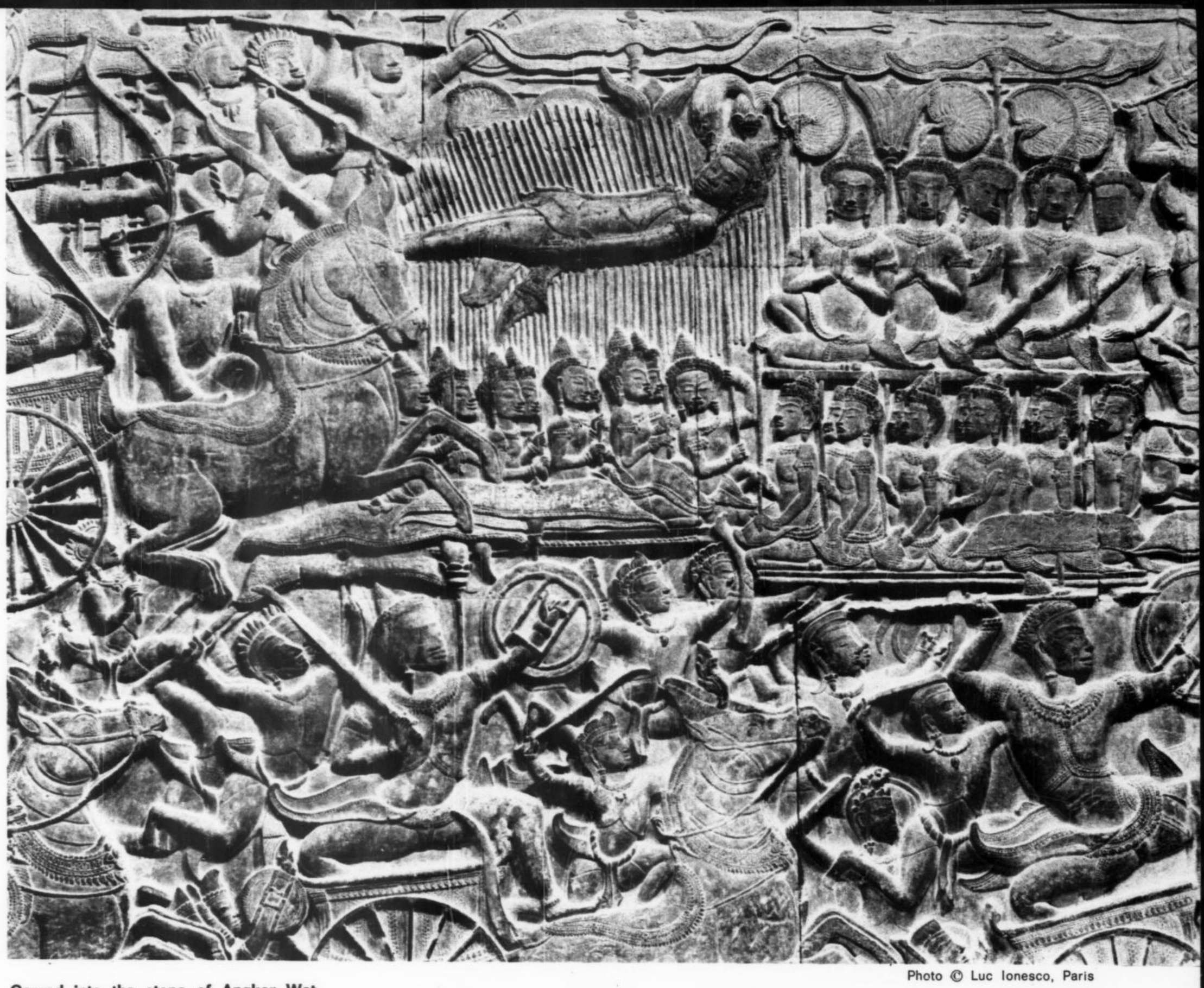


Photo © Luc Ionesco, Paris

Carved into the stone of Angkor Wat, this scene from the Mahabharata **is an outstanding example of the monumental Khmer sculpture of Cambodia which attained its apogee in the first half of the 12th century. In top centre of this carving lies Bhishma, chief of the Kaurava clan, mortally wounded by the arrows of Arjuna, chief of the Pandavas.**

do not appear here, for the story is not an integral part of the narrative of the epic, but a whole age is evoked while all the creatures of the world range on either side of the Ganges in gratitude for this miraculous gift to the Indian world.

It is a little difficult to form an adequate idea of the dimensions of this great piece of sculpture and the impression it makes, for no photograph can easily convey this, but some idea of the scale can be formed from the fact that scores of figures of men and animals, including a family of elephants, are represented here in life size.

This vast, energetic composition, suggestive of the magnificent quality of the myth, is not confined by any frame or line, but flows over the whole surface of the boulder. Benjamin Rawland has said: "Just as the space of the relief is untrammelled and, indeed, seems to flow into the space occupied by the spectator, so the individual forms in it are only partially disengaged from the stone which imprisons them. One has the impression, indeed, that they are in continual process of emergence from the substance of the rock itself."

This seemingly is the age of great, dynamic conceptions in the art of India, one of the finest hours of creative expression in human history. And the great rock-cut, eighth-century Kailasanath temple at Ellora, near Bombay, fits naturally into this age.

This enormous monolithic temple, cut out of the rock, is dedicated to Shiva after whose home, the sacred mountain Kailasa, it is named. But this association with Shiva is no bar in the mind of the Indian sculptor against the representation of non-Shivaite themes in the temple. There are in fact numerous episodes from the *Ramayana* that are carved in relief on the walls of the temple and the smaller sancturies that form a part of the entire complex.

The mood here is dramatic and scenes of remarkable liveliness unfold themselves before the eye of the spectator who becomes gradually a participant in the drama. Among the most impressive scenes is one which shows the abduction of Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana,* by the demon-King, Ravana of Lanka. The moment chosen by the sculptor is that in which Ravana is fleeing with Sita on a chariot towards his kingdom in Lanka, and his way is barred by the vulture-king, Jatayu.

The relief depicting this is an unbelievably fine realization of dramatic posture in sculpture. The figure of Sita is mutilated, but the demon-king powerfully breaks free from the simple background of the composition, a menacing figure, twisting around angrily to deal with the bird that vainly pecks at him.

The most dramatic and the most monumental of reliefs at Ellora, however, is Ravana shaking Mount Kailasa. This is an illustration of the episode in the *Ramayana* where Ravana attempts to shake and uproot the sacred mountain on which Shiva and Parvati are seated, in order to use it as a weapon in the great war against Rama, and to destroy the power of Shiva (see photo page 2).

The Ellora tableau—it is difficult to simply call it a relief—shows Ravana, imprisoned in the foundations of the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

mountain, "in a cavern almost of Stygian gloom", straining his manifold arms to shake the mountain with one superhuman endeavour. The body of the demon-king dissolves into the dark recess, as his arms in the half light seem actually to move and throb with life.

In the upper part of the composition, however, everything is calm, for Shiva with supreme effortlessness simply stretches one of his toes to press the mountain down with it. The panic of the fleeing figures, the intuitive fright of Parvati, as she leans to seek support from her Lord as the mountain trembles, are all in marvellous contrast with the unruffled serenity of the posture of Shiva.

The total effect is indescribable for this is one gigantic theatrical tableau which sweeps the spectator off his feet. Depth and darkness invest the entire scene with a remarkable emotional and psychological suggestiveness. We here have one of the most dramatic compositions in the entire history of art.

With this monument, it is almost as if the last great statement of an epic theme, at least as far as sculpture in India is concerned, has been made. There is much that follows, but in themes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* treated in various periods and schools of art, there is a certain loss in intensity of feeling. The vision falters a little. The interest in fact shifts now to a distant region, the lands of South-East Asia.

Indian settlements from a time going back to the beginning of the Christian era are known in these parts, but the great periods of art date from the seventh century onwards, when there is evidence of Indian culture being firmly rooted there. There is an enormous amount of artistic and construction activity. The most impressive monuments of Buddhism and Hinduism alike are not in India, but in South-East Asia.

With the institution of religious pilgrimages in the seventh and eighth centuries, great complexes of temples rose on the Dieng plateau in Middle Java, the majority of them dedicated to Vishnu. To this period also belongs that supreme monument of mystic Buddhism, the stupa of Borobudur, rivalled by the great Hindu temple, the ninth-century Chandi Loro Jongrang near Prambanam in Java.

This latter monument is profusely decorated with sculptures, the finest of the carvings illustrating the earlier part of the *Ramayana*. These run in a continuous frieze on the exterior of the balustrade of the upper terrace of the temple of Shiva, and their continuation was probably to be found on the corresponding terrace of the now ruined Brahma shrine on the right.

The style of these reliefs at Prambanam, as indeed of the beautiful reliefs of the great stupa at Borobudur, which are perhaps even

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

Colour pages

Photo © P. Almasy, Paris

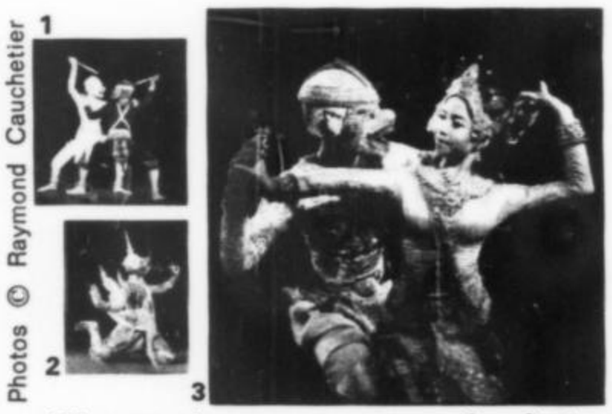
THE GRANDEUR OF MAHABALIPURAM (Page 21)

At Mahabalipuram, 35 miles south of Madras, near a group of temples dedicated to Draupadi and the Pandava heroes of the Mahabharata, **a massive granite boulder dominates the sea-shore. With its entire face carved to represent a scene of epic grandeur, filled with gods, winged figures, water-sprites and animals of all kinds (like those in this photo), the mighty rock (90 ft. by 20 ft.) is a monumental record of sculptural art in 7th-century India. Its theme, the subject of some controversy, has been variously identified as "The Descent of the Ganges" or "The Story of Arjuna's Penance".**

THE SIEGE OF LANKA (Pages 22-23)

This striking painting (22 in. by 33) by an artist of the Punjab Hills, northern India, dates from 1720. It portrays an episode from the Ramayana: **in the gardens of his palace on the island of Lanka (Ceylon), Ravana tries in vain to seduce his captive, the beautiful Sita. Aided by a huge army of monkeys, Rama lays siege to Lanka and slays Ravana after a terrible hand-to-hand combat. Two centuries ago the Punjab Hills, and notably the small mountain kingdom of Guler, became a great centre of miniature painting in India, many of whose works were inspired by themes from the** Ramayana **and the** Mahabharata. **This painting is now in the Cleveland Museum of Art (gift of George P. Bickford).**

Photo © Cleveland Museum of Art, courtesy Asia Society, New York



Photos © Raymond Cauchetier

RAMA THE FAMOUS (pages 24-25)

For many centuries Cambodia's theatrical art has drawn much of its classical repertory from the Ramayana, **which is known to the Cambodians as the** Ramakerti, **or "Rama the Famous". The ballet composed of scenes from the epic mimed by actor-dancers is a magnificent and ever-popular spectacle. These photos were taken during a recent performance by the corps de ballet of the royal palace at Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. The different characters are easily distinguishable by their ornate masks and glittering costumes. (1) In a combat between monkeys, the valiant Hanuman, ally of Rama, is masked and dressed in white. (3) Discovering Sita imprisoned in Ravana's palace, Hanuman tells her that she will soon be freed by Rama. (2) Garuda, half-man half bird, the powerful charger of the God Vishnu. Garuda aided Rama in the battle to deliver Sita.**

Photo © R. Cauchetier

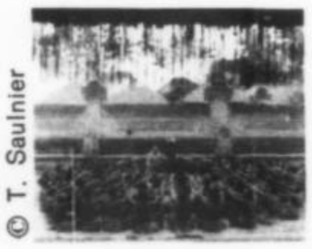
TRIUMPH OF GOOD OVER EVIL (page 26)

Rama's combat with Ravana is the dramatic climax of this scene from a ballet given in the royal palace at Phnom Penh (Cambodia). Symbolizing the triumph of good over evil, Rama brandishes his bow and with the aid of his ally, Hanuman the monkey, subdues his adversary. Here, a woman dancer takes the role of Rama. Formerly the entire corps de ballet was composed of Khmer women dancers. Nowadays the roles of the monkeys in the Ramayana **are taken by men while men and women alternate in the role of the masked Ravana during the same performance.**

Photo © P. Almasy

THAILAND'S MASKED DANCE (page 27)

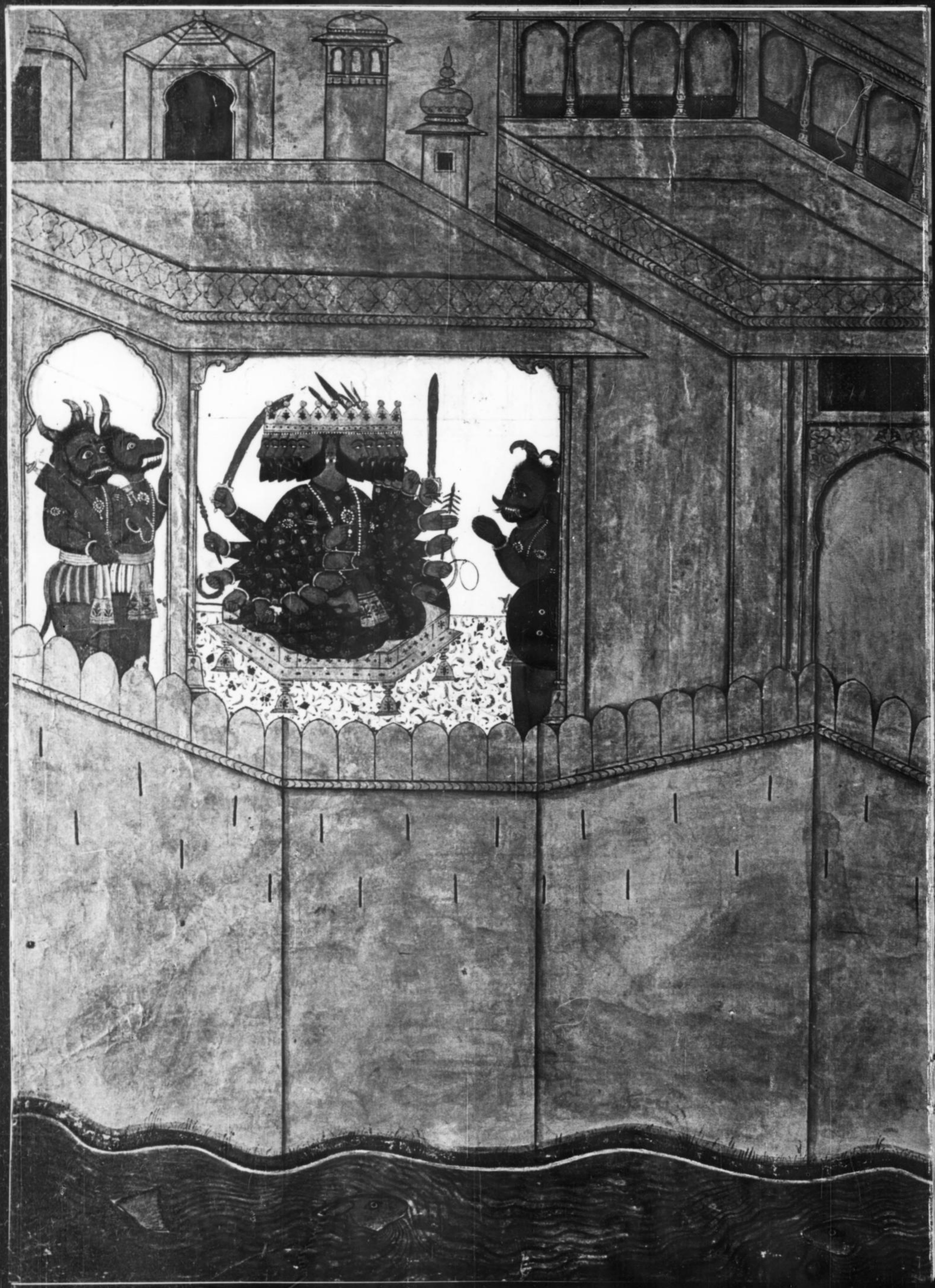
One of the most ancient forms of theatrical art in Thailand is the masked pantomime performed by richly costumed dancers. This scene re-enacts the struggle between Rama and Ravana. In the dance-dramas of Thailand, as in those of Cambodia and Laos, Ravana wears a high pointed headdress and Hanuman a white mask. The Thai title of this mask-play, Rama Kien, **signifies "Rama, the Famous".**

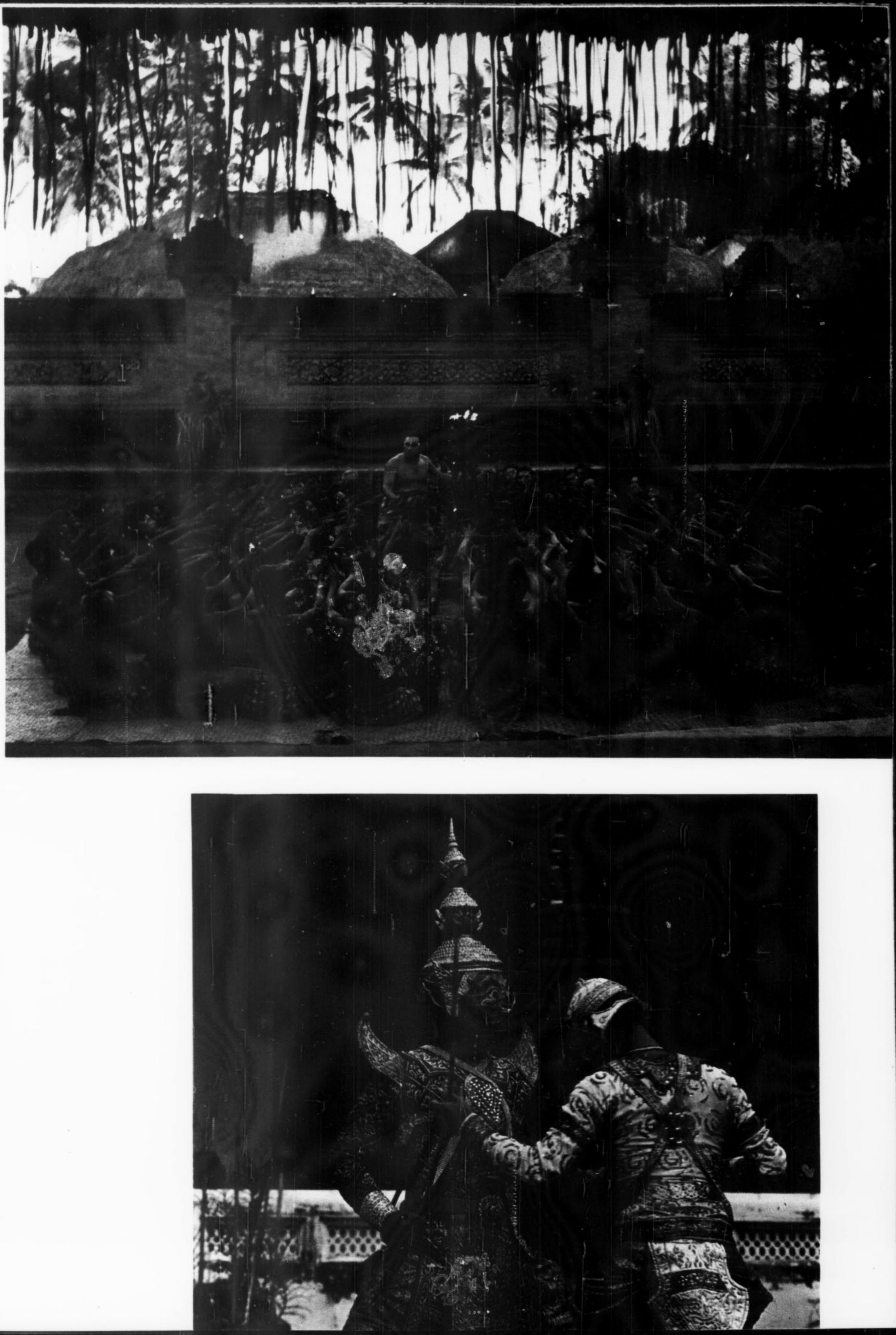


© T. Saulnier

DANCE OF THE MONKEYS (page 27)

On the island of Bali (Indonesia) a unique dance-drama, the "ketjak" or "dance of the monkeys", presents episodes from the Ramayana. **It is performed by 150 village men who sit in circles around a great wooden torch, swaying in rhythm as they chant. From time to time the figure of a narrator rises above the swaying chorus and in tones alternately plaintive and forceful recites the theme of the epic, recalling the deeds of heroes at grips with demons Often the monotonous melodic chant is broken by imitations of the jabbering, squeaking and chattering of the army of monkeys in the** Ramayana. **The wandering voices, wailing cries and swaying gesticulating figures all combine to enhance the exorcistic character of the dance. It was in fact once used as an incantation to ward off evil forces from the village.**





 (Continued from page 20)

One of the supreme arts of all time

superior, goes back clearly to the Gupta reliefs at Deogarh. There is the same quality of noble restraint in the work. There is drama here, and much movement.

Panel after panel illustrates that part of the *Ramayana* where Rama is a witness to and a participant in the fight between the monkey-kings, Sugriva and Bali, and in these there is an extraordinary animation, but the emotion is again controlled. With suavity and grace, the Javanese sculptor makes his statements, always employing economy but always succeeding in evoking the feeling inherent in the epic episodes.

We become witnesses to the divine power of Rama as he bends his bow with a movement of marvellous rhythm to conquer the Ocean; we participate in the struggle between good and evil as the monkey-kings grapple in their death struggle and Rama shoots his arrow from behind seven trees. Everything here is vitally alive.

The Indian models that so obviously provided the inspiration for the work in Java, lay also at the base of the great periods of art from the first to the seventh century in Cambodia. But the styles change rapidly after the upheaval of the eighth century and the Khmer period of art in Cambodia begins.

The relatively subordinate position occupied by sculpture in the architectural monuments of the pre-Khmer period also changes and we enter upon a period of increased sculptural ornament that leads, step by step, to the final explosive, Baroque style of the last period.

The quiet note of early sculptures like those at Sambor is left behind even by an early monument of the First Style of Angkor, that jewel of a shrine at Banteay Srei, which an inscription dates to the ninth century.

Several important lintels here illustrate scenes from the *Ramayana* and are set inside richly ornamented, sinuously profiled arches. The scenes are arranged in a formal manner, but the symmetry does not jar. There is an almost perfect balance in the compositions, whether they be illustrations of the battle between the monkey-kings, or of Ravana shaking Mount Kailasa again.

But in these there is an element of ornamentation. The scenes lack that dynamic character which belonged to the Indian reliefs of the eighth century, and the representations are suggestive of a playful air, "as though the figures were moving to the measures of an elaborate ballet."

The great Cambodian expressions in sculpture came however from the stupendous monument, the 12th-century temple complex of Angkor Wat. It is not only the architecture of this monument of Khmer civilization at its grandest that is difficult to describe, but also the sculpture which covers wall after massive wall.

Battle scenes are a favourite with the Angkor Wat sculptors, and of these the most impressive and awe-inspiring are those that illustrate the Great War from the *Mahabharata*. The magnitude and the brilliance of the epic scene are matched in this relief.

"The uproar and confusion, fierce assault and valiant defence, of the battlefield are rendered with incredible skill and inexhaustible invention, the whole surface of the wall being decorated with forms in a brilliant variety of dramatic postures," says the great orientalist, Heinrich Zimmer, and adds, "Once the eye has become accustomed to this unemphatic style there is an almost infinitely rich variation to dwell upon and take in."

We have here one of the supreme arts of all time at its moment of climax. The flatness of the surface of these reliefs, a little disturbing to an eye not used to it, is completely intentional, for it is wholly appropriate to the almost sunless galleries of the temple.

The monotony of these anonymous reliefs is only superficial, for in fact there is in these scenes a dazzling display of inventiveness, achieved with an appearance of supreme ease. Working on these scenes of a heroic mould, the Khmer sculptors made whole walls spring to life with the great action which is described with such virtuosity and vividness in the pages of the epic.

Only a century removed from Angkor Wat is the great mass of the Bayon at the centre of Angkor Thom. Here again, there are whole friezes representing scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as at Angkor Wat. This in spite of the fact that the Bayon is a Buddhist monument, but then it is only nominally so, for in fact it reflects the true character of the Cambodian ruler, Jayavarman, who was neither a Buddhist nor a Hindu but a Devaraja, or God-King. Angkor Thom once again displays the Khmer virtuosity which is carried forward from the preceding century and which ceases only with the disaster that befell this civilization in the fifteenth century.

What might be called the last of the great periods of sculpture, at least as far as the representation of scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in South-East Asia goes, is to be seen at the fourteenth-century shrine in Java, called the Chandi Panataran. Here the epic is the same, but the style has changed appreciably. In a fantastic landscape of forests and clouds that in itself is reminiscent of an artificial stage-set, characters from the epics take on the aspect of puppets from the shadow plays of subsequent centuries for which they provided obvious inspiration. After this only stray voices are to be heard.

In India at this time any sculptures dealing with the themes from the epics which we can call worthy of their subject matter are now in bronze. The growth of creativity from the eleventh century onwards in southern India is concentrated in the Chola kingdom, and bronzes of breathtaking beauty, including the famous Shiva Nataraja, are produced.

Shaivism, however, does not claim the entire attention of the Chola craftsmen; there is a great deal of sculpture of Rama and Krishna themes. But the sculpture, in the nature of things, is not monumental, nor is it narrative in any manner of speaking. The concentration is on the production of icons which spring from the needs of religion, not the narrative of the epics. We do have deeply moving sculptures like that of the great monkey-God, Hanuman, who becomes in the popular mind the archetypal devotee of Rama, but the figures are isolated. They do not become integrated with a narration in terms of sculpture.

In stone, there are still numerous representations of epic themes and the *Ramayana* reliefs from Halebid in the southern state of Mysore, or the temple of the Thousand Ramas from the Vijayanagar kingdom in South-East India are cases in point, but nothing as deeply moving as in the earlier periods is seen. Great sculpture now treats of other themes, and in the representation of epic themes attention now positively shifts to painting.

From the great periods of early

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

INDONESIA'S WAYANG SHADOW THEATRE

The name "shadow theatre" is inseparably linked with Indonesia and its culture. Here, the word "wayang" (literally, "shadow"), identifies the flat, leather-carved rod puppets whose shadows are projected on to a screen. A form of entertainment as popular as the cinema in Western countries, the shadow theatre is a superb medium for storytelling and has captivated untold generations with its presentations of ancient tales, bringing to life great epics such as the Mahabharata **and the** Ramayana. **The Wayang theatre, which is believed to have originated in India, is also found in Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia (see page 34), and in parts of southern India. The smallest of the Indonesian puppets is about 9 inches high, the tallest sometimes close to 40. A full set of puppets may number 300 to 400 characters, each made according to strict rules of iconography and all easily recognizable. Left, episode from the** Mahabharata **presented at Jogjakarta (Indonesia).**

Photo © Tony Saulnier, Paris

THE EXILE OF RAMA

Below we publish Chapter 11 of the Ayodhya Canto of the Ramayana by Kamban, one of the greatest classic Tamil poets of the 9th century. Translated from the Tamil by Sri Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the work was published in 1961 by George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, in the Unesco Collection of Representative Works. The aged king Dasathara chooses one of his four sons, Rama, to succeed him as ruler of Ayodhya, but is finally pursuaded by one of his wives to name Rama's brother Bharata as his successor. Bowing to his father's decision, Rama prepares to leave the capital and his wife. Sita refuses to accept this separation and insists on accompanying Rama and his brother Lakshmana into exile. **Text copyright ©. Reproduction prohibited.**

The city was distressed and citizens were dazed
And crowds unending followed as he went.
Rama arrived where Janaki was (1).
Startled, she rose, for she did not understand
Why the crowd did weep or why they came
Thus dazed and covered with dust.
Nor why her prince was strangely clad.

Her fright increased
As the women about embraced her;
They would not speak but smothered her in tears.
She turned her large eyes then to Rama:
"My prince, tell me now,
Is the king well
Or has some illness stricken him?"

And Rama quietly spoke:
"My peerless brother beloved will rule the realm
By the command of them that gave me being.
I go today to see the hills
From where the rains are sent.
And till I come again abstain from grief."

She sobbed but not for his dread exile
Or for the kingdom's sake:
She sobbed for the cruel words that scalded her ears:
"Grieve not the time I shall be away!"

For how could Sita bear the thought
Of separation? Were they not
An eternal pair together in the sea of milk—
Together again on earth when he chose to be born
In Ayodhya to set the troubled world aright?

"This his resolve is surely good:
That which the king and our mother
Commanded him to do, so he must.
But why must I remain behind?"
She thought, heart near to breaking.

Then softly spoke she to Rama:
"How can you steel your heart
And cruelly leave me here and go?
Is it hot in the wilderness?
Can the sun scorch me so much there
As life here without you?"

He heard her words and his eyes saw
The sea of grief behind her tears.
He had no heart to leave her thus
And he pondered what to do;
Sita went in and soon came out
Clad in bark and stood by him
And quietly held him by the hand and laughed.

The women swooned and fell
At the sight of the princess
Thus suddenly prepared for exile.
"Those doomed to live must live,
They cannot die before their time,
In spite of every grief," they cried.

Rama saw that immense crowd
Of women plunged in burning grief.
"Oh, princess dear!" he said,
"Lovelier than lilies and the pearls of the sea
Are your teeth when you are moved to laughter
You know not what it means, beloved
To do as you propose
If you go with me
"Twill lead to sorrow without end."

At these words, Sita always soft in speech
Sweeter than the warbling of birds,
In angry tones did cry: "I understand indeed;
I am your only sorrow.
Cast me aside
And all will then be well!"
Rama spoke no more
And led her through the thronging crowds
Of men and women lamenting loud.

Brother beloved marched in front,
On his shoulder hanging his gut-bound bow;
Janaka's daughter smiling went behind
In hermit habit clad:
Between them walked the exiled prince
Majestic like a great rain-cloud.

O who can find the words
To tell their thoughts when the citizens saw this sight!
"Now that all is over," they cried,
"We no more shall weep and wail
But exiles all proceed with him,
To live where he abides who is ever our king."

The three received their royal mothers' leave
And Rama softly said to them: "I leave
My lord and father to your care,"
Then mounted he Sumantra's chariot
With beloved brother and divine spouse.

The city emptied with Rama's chariot;
The king remained and so his queens;
The paintings and the statues stayed behind too
For want of life.

As Sumantra drove the chariot
The cows flocked home and the stars began to appear.
The sun plunged among the hills
As though to shut his eye against the scene.

(1) As the adopted daughter of Janaka, king of Mithila, Sita is also called Janaki.

(Continued from page 29)

Photo © Bulloz, Paris

This Indian miniature by an artist of the Mughal school (late 16th century) depicts the meeting between Rama and his brother Bharata in the forest. Bharata is outraged by the intrigue that has deprived his beloved brother of the throne and telling Rama, "I will not wear the crown that evil plotting has bestowed on me", implores him to return as lawful ruler of Ayodhya. But Rama in obedience to his father's command chooses to remain in exile. He gives his sandals to Bharata as a symbol of authority and asks him to rule as regent in his place until his exile ends.

Indian painting from which we have the frescoes of Ajanta, Bagh and Badami, nothing has survived to indicate the existence of any great cycles of paintings of Vaishnava themes although literary references to illustrations of epic themes abound. But soon after we move into the world of miniature painting, we come upon extensive sets devoted to illustrations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, even if in the style commonly known as Western Indian, or Jaina, not many representations of these themes are found.

Among the first of the great sets of miniature paintings dealing with the theme of the epics is an extensive and brilliant series that was painted for the Mughal Emperor, Akbar (1542-1605). This is the famous illustrated *Razmnama* a translation into Persian of the *Mahabharata*, made under the orders of the great Emperor himself, and rendered in painting by the artists of the Imperial atelier.

The set is believed to have been completed by the year 1589, and an estimated four hundred thousand rupees were paid to the artists who drew and coloured the 169 full page miniatures which are now in the collection of the Maharaja of Jaipur.

This is one of the most sumptuous of all Mughal manuscripts and we are fortunate in having the names of several artists who collaborated to produce this enormous work. This is an exception to the great Indian tradition of anonymity in the arts, "one of the proudest distinctions of Hindu culture."

We know little or nothing of the nameless artists who created the masterpieces of sculpture mentioned above, but many of the Mughal paintings, in keeping with their own tradition, are signed. Of the names of several artists who are associated with this great set, the most famous are those of the gifted Daswanth and his son, Basawan, two Hindu painters working under the guidance and supervision of Muslim master artists of the Imperial atelier.

There is great richness and perception in the work of these and other artists. The colour and line are dazzling. But there is something that seems to be lacking in the series, perhaps it is the feeling of devotion. One senses that the epic has been reduced in the transfer to the painted page. The series tends to become the illustration of an engaging story, uninformed by the spiritual undercurrent which runs through the epic as we know it.

Important series of illustrations of the *Ramayana* were also executed in the Mughal period, and several sets, some in the Imperial style others in the provincial, have survived. There is little doubt that the narrative of the epics had conquered the imagination of the Mughal artists of the early period, and they illustrated it with verve and imagination, but not perhaps with the same intensity of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

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Photo © Yves Coffin, Paris

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Photos © Luc Ionesco, Paris

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MOVING TRAGEDIES IN STONE

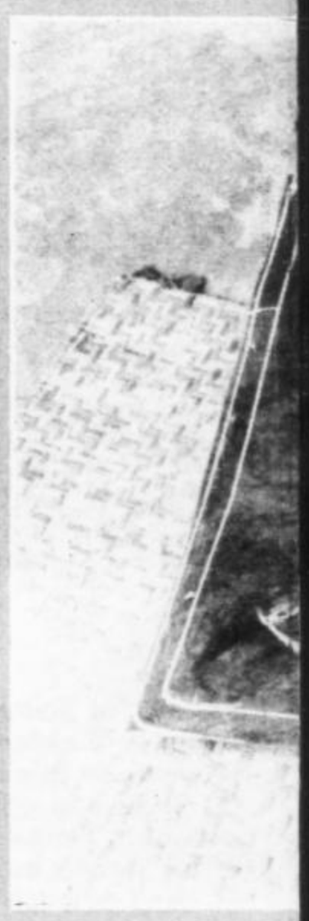
Photo © Luc Ionesco, Paris

An ally of Rama in his campaign to free his wife is the monkey-king Sugriva, who has been dispossesed of his throne and exiled by his half-brother Bali. The adventures and prowess of the monkey heroes of the Ramayana figure prominently in sculptures of all of South East Asia. Shown here are four of rare beauty by Khmer artists in Cambodia. (1) Sugriva at grips with Bali, a 10th-century carving at Koh Ker, 60 miles east of Angkor. (2) Rama drives his chariot to Lanka to deliver his wife Sita with the help of his monkey allies. (3) Sugriva weeps with anguish on being usurped of his throne by Bali. These two 11th-century bas-reliefs are carved on the Baphuon temple at Angkor. (4) A masterpiece of deep emotion in stone: pierced by Rama's arrow, Bali dies in the arms of his wife—12th-century bas-relief, Angkor Wat.

In Cambodia

SHADOWS AND LIGHT ON THE RAMAYANA

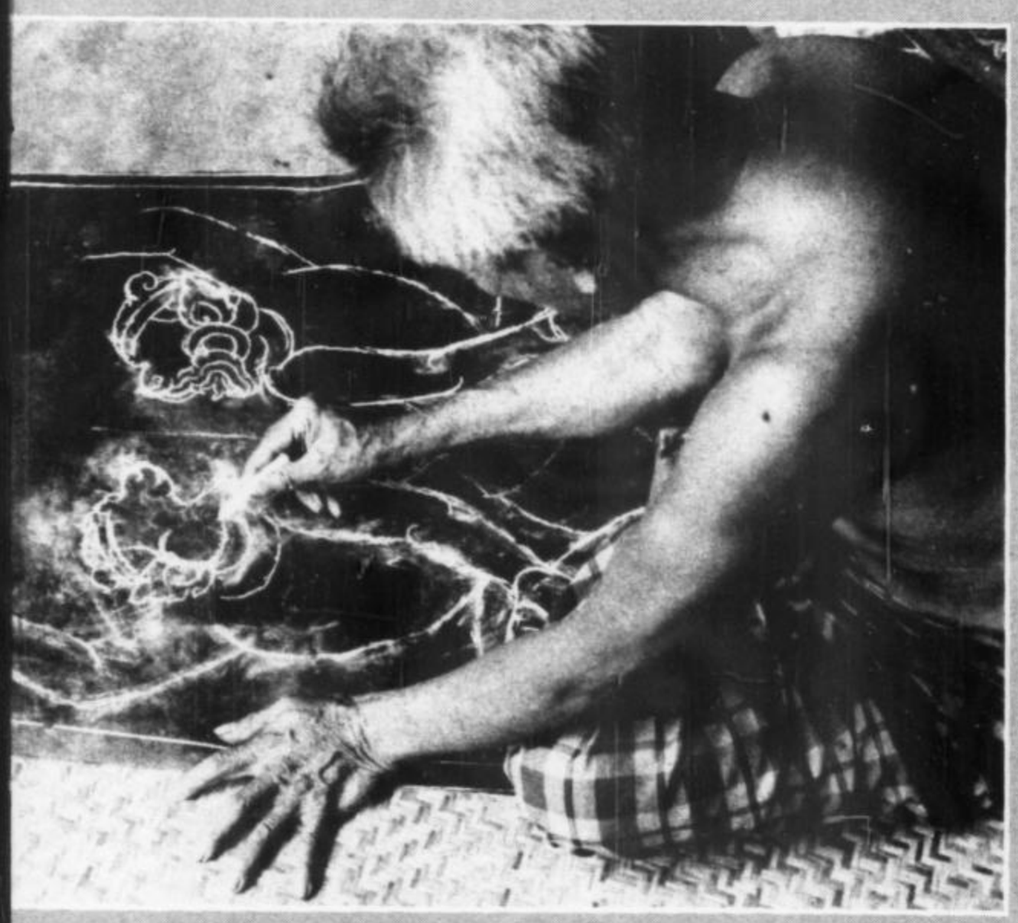
USING its polished, allusive art to transport its audience into the realms of ancient lore, the shadow theatre has acquired a distinct technique and style of its own in every Asian country where it exists (see page 28). In Cambodia, performances nowadays are limited to important occasions—the king's birthday, for example, or the cremation of a famous person. Cambodia's puppets made of perforated hide are not isolated silhouettes like those of Indonesia, but are placed in a decorative frame in which the character is surrounded by "scenery"—motifs of various kinds that relate to the scene being played. These elegant, often leaf-shaped frames are seen as shadows on a translucid screen lit from behind by candles. Above, "behind the screens" as puppet manipulators at Siem-Reap, near Angkor, present an episode from the Ramayana. Right, as the audience sees the performance: holding up the puppets, parts of which resemble exquisite filigree, the manipulators sway from side to side like shadows dancing with shadows. Music on traditional instruments accompanies the performance, and a narrator embellishes his account of the story with subtle and comic allusions that delight his audience.



Left, a performer holds up to the shadow screen a frame depicting an episode from the Ramayana: Sita is found in her place of captivity by the vultures which Rama has sent in search of her.

Photos © Luc Ionesco, Paris

Shadow theatre puppets are made with meticulous care and skill by artists who respect a traditional iconography yet imprint their work with individual artistic touches. Below, working on a rectangle of buffalo hide, a Cambodian artists at Siem-Reap sketches two monkeys in combat. Right, another artist carves outlines of a figure and motifs on a completed drawing.



THE KATHAKALI AND THE DANCE-DRAMA OF INDIA

by C. Kunchu Nair

KATHAKALI is the principal dance-drama form of Kerala, a narrow strip of land lying on the coast of south-west India. Though confined thus to a small area, Kathakali is a part of an all-India tradition of classical theatre and shares with its sister arts in other parts of India certain broad features which sharply mark off the Indian tradition from its counterpart in the West.

It is neither possible nor necessary to discuss here all these common features relating to the growth of unity in the Indian Theatre movement. But, at the same time, one cannot loose sight of certain striking factors and circumstances which tended to govern the content and form of this traditional theatre.

One such factor was the most intimate and enduring connexion the theatre had maintained ever since its birth with the religion of the land in all its changing forms and with its recorded and written literature. The most important of this large body of religious literature were and still are the two very great and powerful epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the later *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Apart from their historical and literary value, these bulky compilations represented India's earliest memories, collective wisdom and consciousness and its religious and moral attitude. Not only did they contain discussions of various philosophical schools, codes of morality and ethics and of abstract qualities of virtue and vice, happiness and sorrow and nobility and baseness; but they also portrayed in bold types and as the real embodiments of these principles, noble heroes and heroines and villains of all kinds.

They narrated stories of great battles between good and evil and how the former always triumphed over the latter; they explained how the gods often descended on the earth and mingled and shared with human beings their joys and sorrows; how the virtuous on the earth went to Heaven to enjoy the fruits of their good deeds and how the vicious were dragged to Hell to answer and suffer for their black deeds; if the gods sometimes lapsed into human weaknesses, the mortals often rose to the state of godliness.

Always with ready answers to the problems that troubled the suffering human heart and with constant advice through sweet persuasion and unmistakable examples, these epics seemed so near and dear that people came to think of them as part of their very selves.

No wonder, then, that these holy books—especially the *Mahabharata, Ramayana* and *Bhagavad-Gita*—exerted so powerful and lasting an influence on the minds and daily lives of the people and proved, over the ages, to be inexhaustible sources supplying a rich variety of themes for art and literature in India. Rarely did any artist or writer feel any compulsion to look elsewhere for his subject matter.

Not that Indian Society remained static. Changes there were in the

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C. KUNCHU NAIR *began his studies and training in the Kathakali dance-drama at the age of 15. He has devoted the past 43 years of his life to the subject, studying first under the late Pattikkamthodi Ravunni Menon, the greatest Kathakali teacher of modern times. He is now director of the most important Kathakali dance academy in Asia—the Keralakalamandalam, in Kerala, south-west India, where he is also senior professor. In 1959 he introduced the Kathakali to Europe and this year his troupe completed a smash hit visit to Europe and Canada. Choreographer and producer, he has studied every aspect of the art of Kathakali.*

KRISHNA AND ARJUNA

Two heroes of the Mahabharata, **Krishna (left) and Arjuna, as they appear in a Kathakali dance-drama. In this scene from the** Bhagavad-Gita, **the God Krishna teaches Arjuna the true virtues of the upright man. The Kathakali theatre, which originated in Kerala, south-west India, in the 17th century, is part of an all-India tradition of classical theatre in which poetry, music and dance are closely intregrated. The mythological characters are easily identified by their highly stylized costumes and make-up and their characteristic miming and gestures.**

Photo © Odile Montserrat, Paris

Four-hour make-up for each dancer

social life, but not basic enough to dislodge these great epics from their supreme position. Any pressures from the changing social and cultural values were absorbed by a slight reworking of the old materials.

This persistance of epic stories as the recurring theme for the theatre had tended to discourage realism. Legends and myths, distortions and exaggerations as they are from real life, could hardly lend themselves to realistic treatment without injuring artistic unity and aesthetic propriety.

Besides, there was an important circumstance that kept realism out of the Indian Theatre. Never in the history of its evolution could drama in India completely break loose from poetry, music and dance as happened in the West. Even as these three arts were having their own independant courses of development, they retained their original connexion with drama. However their development as separate arts necessitated their reintegration with drama at a higher level, the form of integration depending on the preponderance of one or other of the three forms.

The heavy emphasis on poetry, music and dance added to the almost complete dependence on mythological stories, ruled out realism. The only logical and consistant direction the development of Indian Theatre could take from that position was evidently towards an increasingly greater degree of abstraction and stylization and further refinement and rarefaction of technique.

How did the art of acting stand in relation to its three adjuncts—poetry, music and dance? To answer this, we may introduce here the concept of *Abhinayam* developed by Hindu theorists. This term has often been inadequately translated as acting. In fact, it is more than acting and if broadly understood includes poetry, music and dance.

Abhinayam is explained as the art of conveying or communicating to the spectator through suggestion the thoughts and feelings of the characters in relation to their causes and effects. Feelings, emotions and moods were analyzed and classified according to their intensity and permanence. How these feelings are visually projected all over the body through changes in the colour, motion, position, pose, gesture, etc., of the body, its limbs and features and changes in the voice, was closely studied. The movements and gestures and tonal variation were abstracted, stylized, condensed or enlarged and related to définite feelings, moods and actions.

The *Abhinayam* consists primarily in the actor's showing or "acting" these elements thereby suggesting the corresponding feelings, etc., which become sublimated as aesthetic flavour or enjoyment in the spectator.

The Hindu theorists have recognized four elements or aspects of *Abhinayam* according to its means or media as relating to (1) body *(Angikam)*; (2) speech *(Vacikam)*; (3) mind *(Satvikam)*; and external means *(Aharyam)*.

(1) *Angikam* - Proper use of artistic gestures, actor's bearing, walk, movement of features and limbs.

(2) *Vacikam* - Use of proper pronounciation, modulation of voice, accent and rhythm, proper dramatic delivery of the text (prose, poetry and songs).

(3) *Satvikam* - Representation of some of the basic psychic conditions by such means as immobility, perspiration, change of voice, etc.

(4) *Aharyam* - Make-up and costumes and the stage decor and props.

In its wider sense *Angikam* should include dance, and *Vacikam*, music.

Considering these characteristic features which are almost antithetical to the Western concept of drama, it will be more appropriate to call the traditional Indian drama (including dance-drama) a form of "lyrico-dramatic spectacle." Incidently, it is interesting to note that this is also true in varying degrees of most of the countries of the South-East Asia which were once called "Greater India."

THE major forms of Indian dance (of the interpretative type) and dance-dramas like *Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Manipuri, Kathakali, Kuchiputi, Bhagavatamela, Yakshaganam,* etc., which were revived during the last fifty years grew up in this all-India dance tradition. However, in assimilating this tradition each of these forms had its own area of emphasis. Each is firmly rooted in its local folk tradition which imparts and sustains its uniqueness and justifies its independent existence.

Kathakali can be roughly translated as danced play. A cycle of eight plays based on the story of Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana,* was written between 1655 and 1661 A.D. (some scholars say between 1484 and 1497 A.D.) by a ruler of a petty principality called Kottarakara.

Many poets wrote *Kathakali* plays during the last three hundred years, but only some thirty of this large collection, numbering more than a hundred, remained and still remain popular on the stage. Of these nine are based on the *Ramayana,* thirteen on the *Mahabharata* and seven on the *Bhagavad-Gita.*

In preparing the ground for the emergence of this new form, the tradition of the older dance forms of Kerala—both folk and classical and

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Colour page

ARTIFICIAL JOWLS OF PAPER AND PASTE

In the Kathakali theatre green make-up and wide eyes (lotus eyes) accentuated by thick black lines identify gods and noble heroes (see page 36). Violent characters such as the ruthless Duryodhana of the Kaurava clan (top left) wear green make-up variegated with red and white, and grotesque protuberances on their noses. Outright scoundrels like Duryodhana's brother, Dussasana (top, far left) have red beards and are made up to look repulsive and inhuman. Kathakali dancers wear ornately decorated crowns, those with the largest circles being reserved for the most evil and detestable characters.

★

The art of building up the elaborate mask-like facial make-up of the Kathakali dancers is a hereditary vocation and an expert spends up to four hours on each face. About 60 varieties of make-up and costumes are used to portray the different characters: god or demon, woman or brahmin, and many others. A facial border called "chutty" gives new contours to the features. Made of paper and rice paste mixed with lime, it is applied to the cheeks, enlarging the face with the aim of giving greater presence to the character, just as thick-soled shoes were once worn by Greek tragedians. The form of the chutty depends on the character being portrayed. Left, actor completes the chutty he wears with green colouring, to portray a hero of the Mahabharata. **Far left, top: an actor is given a "katti" (knife-shaped) make-up for his role as Duryodhana. Far left, bottom: putting the last touches to the basic make-up. Designs on forehead also serve to identify each character.**

Photo © Odile Montserrat, Paris

Daily practice from 3 a.m. to 9 p.m.

religious and secular—played a great part. Many of the choreographic patterns, the basic stance with the feet planted wide apart and the outstretched hands on either side, the movements for fighting, dance sequences and many of the elements of the make-up and costuming—all show the strong influence of the indigenous folk arts.

Another art form on which *Kathakali* has heavily drawn is *Kutiyattam*—the oldest classical form of drama for the presentation of Sanskrit plays. This form was developed during the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. *Kathakali* is heavily indebted to *Kutiyattam* for its technique of facial expression, hand gestures and many of its stage conventions. It was mainly through it that the all-India tradition reached *Kathakali*. *Kathakali* is thus a fine synthesis between the indigenous *Dravidian* tradition and the all-India tradition.

A *Kathakali* performance usually takes place in the open air and occupies the whole night. Traditionally, the acting area (12 feet square) was not raised, but was on the same level as the spectators who used to squat on the ground, the stage being covered with a pandal (a light roofed structure on poles), which is at least 10½ feet high.

Accompaniment: The musical accompaniment consists of three drums, the Chenda, Maddalam and Edakka, and a gong, a pair of cymbals and a conch shell. The Chenda is not played for a female character and Edakka for males. There are two vocalists, the leading one holding the gong and the other, the cymbals.

Preliminaries: On the day of the performance, at about 6 p.m. a short drumming announces the day's programme. This is called *Keli*.

At about 8.30 p.m. the programme begins. A huge brass lamp with wicks floating in oil placed at the front centre of the stage is lit. Then follows drumming on Maddalam called *Arangukeli*.

Then two stage assistants hold a curtain in front of the stage.

Behind the curtain one or two dancers perform a propitiary prelude called *Thotayam*, in praise of the gods and accompanied on the Maddalam alone. This is followed by a recital of prayers by the two singers.

The next item is the conventional introduction of the important character or charactors of the play selected for the night. In the full splendour of the make-up and costumes and accompanied by all the instrumentalists and vocalists, they perform certain pure dance sequences.

This is called *Purappat*.

Then the stage is given to the musicians alone and they give a recital called *Melappadam*. Now they can show their talents as soloists and more freely explore the possibilities of their arts without their playing being tailored to the demands of the dance or drama.

Story proper: The *Melappadam* concludes the preliminaries, and the rest of the night is taken up by either one full play or exerpts from several.

The *Kathakali* play, the literary text composed by the playwright, is the basis of *Abhinayam*. The text is in the form of verses and songs written usually in highly poetic style. The songs represent dramatic dialogues, the verses being generally the words of the narrator and summarizing those sections of the theme which are not represented on the stage. They often act as the links between the scenes.

Abhinayam (representation): One peculiar feature of *Kathakali* which differentiates it from most other Indian dance dramas deserves special mention. In the other forms, all the four elements of *Abhinayam*, mentioned above, concern the actor-dancer alone. In *Kathakali*, however, he does only three, the *Vacikam* being entrusted to the singers, except that the actor-dancer in certain roles makes some grunts. This suppression of *Vacikam* has led to a remarkable development and elaboration of the facial expression of the actor-dancer to an extent not often seen in any other school.

Vacikam (relating to speech or singing): The singing of the verses and songs forming the text of the play constitutes the *Vacikam*. As the singer sings the lines of the songs, the actor-dancer interprets the ideas and feelings contained in them. The melody-moulds, the rhythms and the tempi of the songs are of great significance. Their choice is so carefully made as to create a variety of moods, to retard or quicken the speed of the action and to draw out or compress the movement according to the need of the particular plot situation or feelings being projected. For instance a song for a battle scene and one for a love scene are entirely different in their rendering, melody-moulds and tempi.

Angikam (relating to the body): The sole medium for *Angikam* is the body of the actor. The silent artist suggests the idea and related feelings contained in the words and sentences of the songs with the help of the movements of the body, its limbs and features. They include hand-gestures, mime, dance, etc.

In between the stanzas the actor usually executes a sequence of dance. This is not pure or abstract dance. It reflects, by its tempo, quality and nature the general purport of the stanza which precedes or succeeds the dance.

For hand gestures *Kathakali* mainly depends on a short manual which gives 470 gestures deriving them from 24 root gestures. They are classified as single hand, double hand, mixed hand (each hand forming different gestures from the other) and gestures having more than one meaning. There is another division into eight types. Each has its own different pose, direction, movement of the body and way of using space. Eyes normally follow the gestures. The mode of showing the gesture and the accompanying movements of features and limbs are determined by the context, the tempo of the rhythm and the nature of the character portrayed.

ONE other feature is improvisation and solo acting. There are several occasions when there are no textual lines to interpret and the actor is required to fill in the gaps by improvisation. The character may be going through a forest and describing the wild life; or enjoying the sights of Heaven. Here, without the help of any scenic settings, the actor conjures up a succession of visual images in movement in terms of which he tries to explain and interpret the desired theme.

The instrumental music provides a powerful support. Its main function is to simulate all kinds of movements of

C. Kunchu Nair (author of this article) teaching at the Kathakali dance academy, the Keralakalamandalam, in India, of which he is director. Marks in ash on his forehead and chest are the signs of the Lord Shiva.

Photo © Pic, Paris

Introductory dance to a Kathakali drama based on the Mahabharata, **performed at the 1967 Theatre of the Nations festival in Paris. A Kathakali troupe from the Keralakalamandalam in Kerala, India, made a highly successful tour of Europe and Canada this year, with the collaboration of the International Music Council and the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies.**

the actor-dancer including gestures, dances, etc.

Aharyam: This primarily relates to the make-up, costumes and jewellery of the actors and secondly to the stage props. *Kathakali* does not make use of any stage settings. But the make-up and costumes have a most important function in this dance-drama which is primarily to indicate not the birth, age, status, or nationality of the characters but the essential nature of their mental make-up. The distortion, abstraction and exaggeration of the make-up and costumes reflect the same qualities of the mythological characters.

There are now about sixty varieties of make-up and costumes. Major types are the nine given below:

Pacca (Green) - Generally for the noble and virtuous.—Gods and heroes like Rama; *Katti* (Knife) - Characters having vices such as greed, lust and vanity.—Ravana the demon king of Lanka who was killed by Rama; *Tati* (Beard) - Destructive forces in the form of terrifying demons; *Minukku* (Polished) - Females, Brahmins, Sages etc.; *Kari* (Black) - Aborigines, hunter etc.; *Pazhuppu* (Mixture of yellow and red) - Brahma, Shiva and brother Krishna; *Chuvappu* (red) - Sun, Fire etc.; *Teppu* (Painted) - Bird, Snake etc.; *Poymukham* (Masks) - Masks of monkey, pig, old hag etc. are sometimes used.

The process of make-up and costuming in *Kathakali* takes much time—as long as four hours to complete in respect of characters having *Chutty* —the facial border made of rice paste mixed with lime and sometimes paper as well.

First the actor himself draws an outline of the make-up on his face. Then he lies down face upwards and the make-up artist forms the *Chutty* on his face little by little. This takes most of the make-up time.

Next the actor himself completes the remaining details and puts in his eyes a granule-like particle which grows inside the flower of a plant belonging to the Solanaceae family. The particle is retained in the corner of each eye and is removed only after the performance. It makes the eye red and imparts a special glow adding to the expressiveness of the eyes. Then one by one he puts on the costumes and ornaments with the help of dressing room assistants. Before he goes to the stage he pays respects to his teachers.

The materials used for the make-up are: Red arsenic, Indigo cake, Dammar resin, Collyrium, red powder, rice paste, lime, paper, cork, Miea, Gingilly oil and Cocoanut oil.

The technique of *Abhinayam* as used in *Kathakali* and the endless variety of highly stylized and sharply defined movements that goes with it presupposes a long course of hard and rigorous training of the body and mind of the would-be actor-dancer. The training begins at the age of 10 to 12 and lasts for about 12 years. By a long series of repeated exercises and other practices the body is trained to become a proper medium of dance and expression.

After the second year, the student takes part in actual performances as an understudy for minor roles. June to December is the season for training proper. For the rest of the year he participates in as many performances as possible under the guidance of his teacher. As part of the training, he undergoes for three months every year a treatment of oil

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

massage to make his body mellow and supple.

Along with this goes the training of mind. The student learns the text of the plays and tries to understand the problems of characterization, structure of the play and a host of other theories. By the time he leaves the school he has studied at least 15 plays which form the basic core of the *Kathakali* repertoire.

The modern tendency is to reduce the period of training by extending the classroom work to the whole year instead of limiting it to six months as in former times. But the period cannot be reduced to below eight years. The maximum number of students a teacher can handle at a time is four. Girls never act in *Kathakali*, one reason perhaps being the length and rigorous nature of the training required.

A typical time table of training in the past was:

3.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m. — Practice in the movements of eye, brow, lips, neck and other facial features.

4.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m. — Oil is applied to the body; a course of exercises, foot-work, dance movements etc., lead to the massage in which the student lies on a mat and the teacher works his body over with his feet.

8.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. — Practice in the preliminary dances, *Thotayam* and *Purappatu;* rehearsal of the plays.

7.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. — Practice in expressing emotions, feelings and sentiments with the help of eyes, brow, cheek, lips, neck etc., and interpretation of important sections of the play.

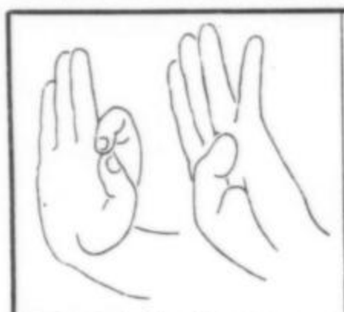
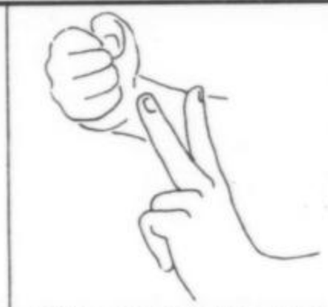
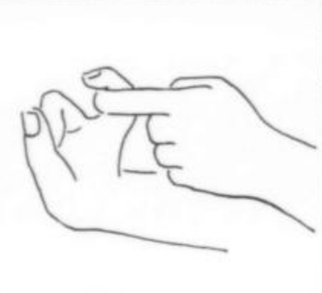
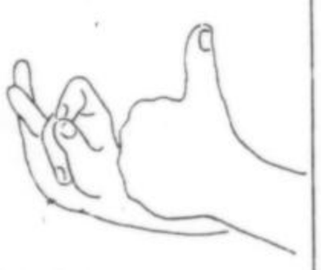
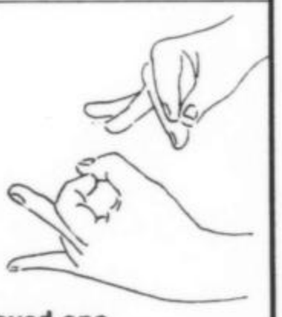
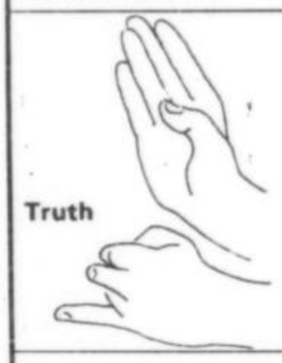
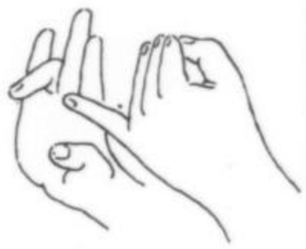
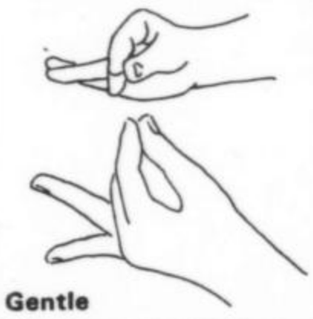
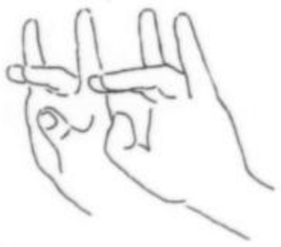
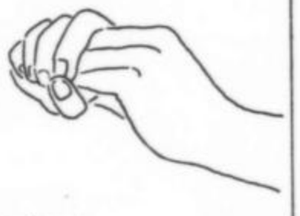
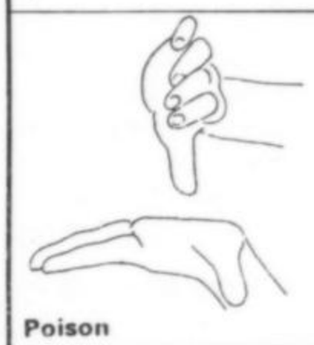
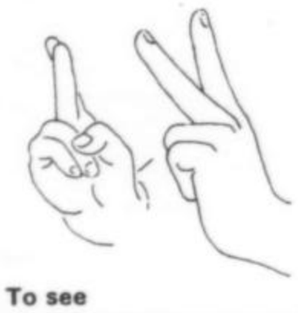
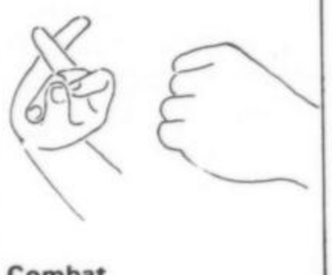
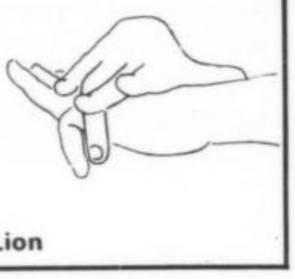
Modern schools of *Kathakali* have had of course to make some concessions to this long and rigorous schedule to allow time for the general education of the students.

As part of India's cultural renaissance which began in the last century, interest in our traditional arts, music dance and drama has been revived. One of the best representatives of this renaissance in Kerala was the late national poet, Vallathol. With the help of his friends he founded in 1930 the Keralakalamandalam the first and now the most well-known Academy to teach *Kathakali* and other arts of Kerala. Vallathol travelled throughout India and visited many countries, popularizing this art form and seeking help for his Academy, which is now owned and run by the Government of Kerala. A troupe from the Academy made a highly successful tour of Europe and Canada from May to September, 1967.

In 1939 a second school—Kottakkal Natyasangham—was started. Today *Kathakali* is growing as an art form and several other schools offering training in *Kathakali* have opened in India.

LANGUAGE OF HANDS. In the Kathakali dance-drama, the songs and verses of the text are sung by soloists. The actor-dancer remains silent, but speaks in a language of gestures, or "mudras". Mudras are the movements and positioning of the hands to represent a word, a person, an idea or an action, and so on. The language is enriched by movements and miming with the body, limbs and features that express the ideas and feelings of the characters in the play. One manual on mudras lists nearly 500 of these hand gestures a few examples of which are shown below.

Drawings © Peter Schumann, Archives of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies, Berlin

 Brahma, the Creator	The Goddess Parvati	 Indra, King of Heaven	 Certainty	Chariot	Disc
 Rama, the hero	Obeisance (greeting)	The five Pandava brothers	To kill	The heavens	 Loved one
 Truth	Reason	 King Duryodhana	Beautiful girl	 Gentle	Lotus
 I	Brother	Sin	Cuckoo	 Marriage	Wife
 Poison	 To see	 Combat	Husband	Tortoise	 Lion

INDIA'S ANCIENT HEROES ON CELLULOID

by Bhagwan D. Garga

Not long ago someone asked the distinguished Indian film maker Satyjit Ray, if it was true that he wished to make a screen version of the *Mahabharata*. "Yes, I do," he replied. "I have given it a lot of thought. It is a theme that endures, a theme of war and peace, tyranny and struggle. Also, it is worthwhile to look at one's roots."

From the classic age of Sanskrit drama some sixteen centuries ago to the present times, poets, playwrights, sculptors and film makers have looked at these roots with growing fascination and drawn sustenance from them.

It is small wonder then that the very first Indian film, "Raja Harishchandra," produced in 1913 by Dhundiraj Gobind Phalke, should have been a mythological tale sung and celebrated throughout the country.

The story concerns Harishchandra, a king known for his piety and truthfulness. One day Viswamitra, the wise Brahmin in the epic literature, demands of him the sacrificial gift due to a Brahmin and the king offers him whatever he might choose to ask, "gold, his own son, wife, body, life, kingdom and good fortune". Viswamitra strips the king of all his worldly possessions leaving him but a garment of bark and his wife and son. The king suffers untold miseries and hardships, sacrifices his son, and is about to offer up his wife, when the gods arrive and entreat him to accompany them to heaven.

The film was a tremendous success. Exciting as films from other countries had hitherto seemed, it was an even greater thrill for the audience to see a familiar, traditional story set in India and performed by Indian actors. It lifted the audience out of day-to-day frustrations into the world of legendary India whose glorious past, familiar in song and story, yet even so, half forgotten, had thus been given living, moving reality.

The impact, in fact, was overwhelming. In one of Phalke's subsequent films, when Krishna appeared on the screen men and women in the audience prostrated themselves. This spontaneous action was not the naive gesture of people mistaking the screen incarnation for the real god; the reverence shown was for the symbol not for the man portraying it.

The first decade of the Indian cinema was given over almost entirely to mythological stories from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The Indian film maker was quick to discover not only the perennial popularity of the two great epics, but also that they were an inexhaustible mine of dramatic material that could be adapted to suit any audience.

In the heyday of the serials, when "The Perils of Pauline" helped Hollywood to make its millions, the Indian film maker, like many others, followed the trend—but on his own terms. In the epics, particularly the *Ramayana*, he discovered a wealth of action—the basic ingredient of the serial film.

One of the earliest serials produced and shown in several instalments in India was "The Exile of Rama" (1918). Thrilling as it may have been to watch. Miss Pearl White dangling from an aeroplane or leaping from a burning building, this heroine was still no match for the monkey-god Hanuman, who could suspend himself in mid-air or lift a mountain on his little finger. Danger lurked behind every bush in the forests where Rama and his beautiful wife, Sita, were exiled. And what greater thrill than to witness the combat between Rama and Ravana, the demon-king, in which Rama struck off Ravana's ten heads one after the other, only to find that as one fell another grew in its place.

THE *Mahabharata* is not only the more ancient and the longer of the two epics, but has a larger fund of stories—those of Nala and Damayanti, of Shakuntala (immortalized by Kalidasa in his play of the same name), of Savitri and, of course, the moving poetic colloquies between Arjuna and Krishna which form a separate book, the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

All these stories lend themselves readily to screen adaptations. The most popular of all is perhaps that of Nala and Damayanti, the story of a beautiful girl for whose hand the gods compete with her lover (a mere mortal) and lose. This ancient story illustrates the humanized concepts of the traditional culture, gods with a touch of human frailty, women celebrated for beauty and wit, men capable of winning when pitted against gods.

The cinematic potentialities of the story are obvious enough, and the first version was made as early as 1919 by Madan Theatres of Calcutta, with an Italian, Eugenio De Liguoro, directing the film. "Nala and Damayanti" has since been filmed at least twenty times, but has lost none of its popularity.

The advent of sound films served, if anything, to increase the popularity of scenarios based on the epics. It is significant that among the first sound films by far the best was "Ayodhya Ka Raja" (The King of Ayodhya), a mythological film. A little later, in 1934, came "Sita," directed by Devaki Bose, which is perhaps the finest screen rendering of the *Ramayana* to date.

Devaki Bose used a characteristically Indian device in unfolding his story. The ancient Sanscrit dramas traditionally opened with a prologue in which the chief actor or narrator (the *sutradhar*) outlined the story or commented on one or another aspect of the play. Bose opened his film with a commentary of this kind illustrated with murals depicting incidents from the lives of Rama and Sita.

During the Second World War when the demand for entertainment increased tremendously and commercial companies in consequence took the line of least resistance, Indian films too showed obvious signs of decline and "fatigue". Significantly, the two outstanding films of the period were "Ram Rajya" (The Reign of Rama) and "Shakuntala", the first based on the *Ramayana* and the second on the *Mahabharata*.

In "Ram Rajya" the crucial moment comes when Rama, though convinced of the chastity of his wife, Sita, while she was the captive of Ravana, nevertheless sends her into exile after hearing a callous remark casting doubt on her innocence. Vijay Bhatt, director of the film, has recalled public reactions to this part of the story when he showed his film in New York. "Many people asked me why the kindly Rama yielded to the wishes of the people in spite of his conviction that Sita was innocent. I replied that this was the difference between the democratic kings of the West and of the East. Edward VIII left the people for the sake of his wife; Rama left his wife for the sake of the people."

Superficially, Vijay Bhatt's reply might appear chauvinistic and vain; in reality it is nothing of the sort. It shows how the Indian is always comparing and judging his own conduct (and sometimes that of others) by the standards set in the epics. These standards are by no means unattainable. In fact the popularity of the epics is mainly due to their deep humanity, wherein gods behave like ordinary men and men like gods.

BHAGWAN GARGA *is an Indian cinema historian and film critic. He has written on many aspects of the Indian cinema and has produced a number of documentary films on Indian film-making and Indian art. On an international level, he has helped to arrange the exchange of films between India and France and was a member of the Unesco committee of experts on Anthologies of the History of the Cinema which met in Paris in April 1967. Bhagwan Garga is to prepare the Indian anthology.*

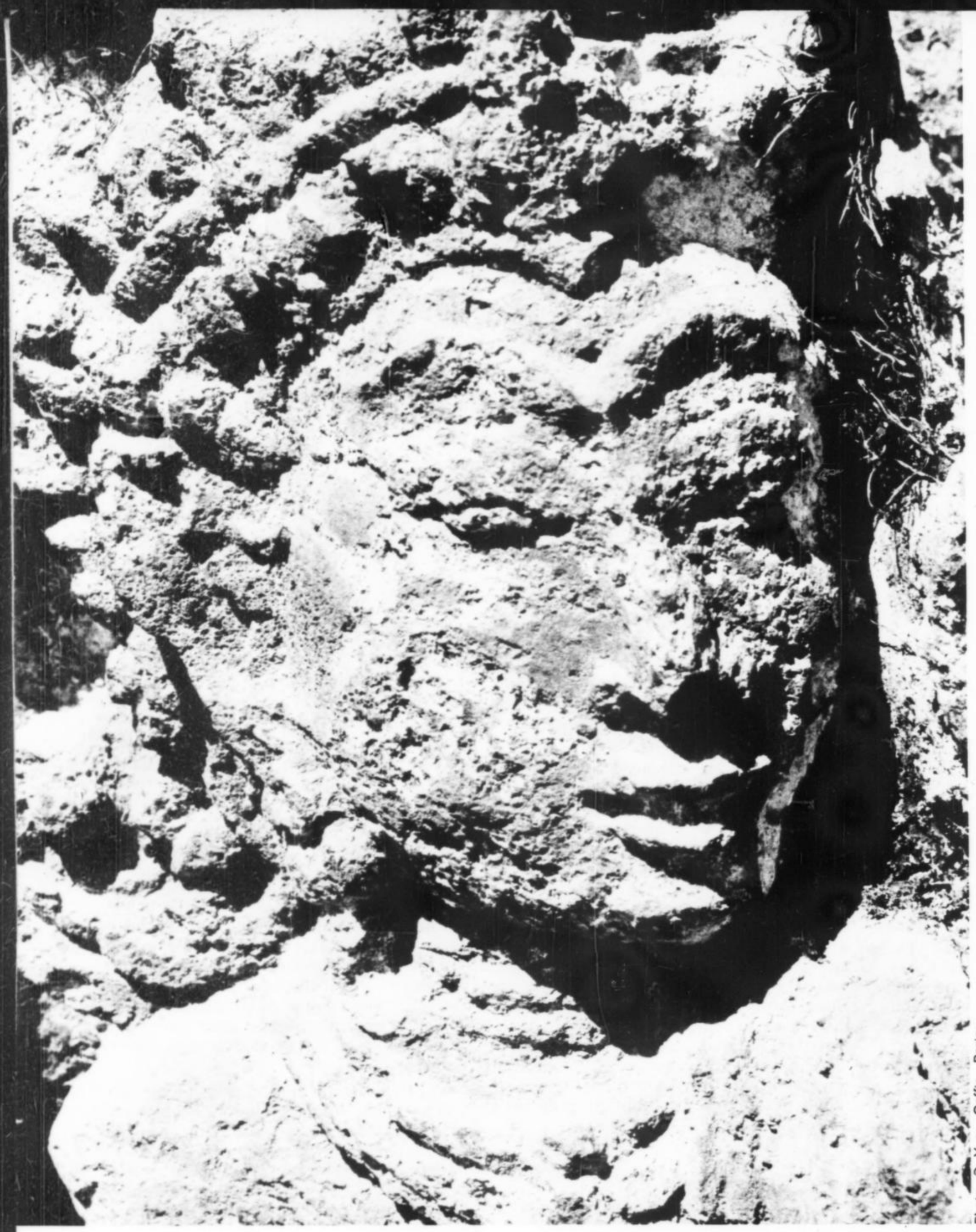


Photo © Yves Coffin, Paris

In many temples on the island of Java (Indonesia), notably the famous temple of Prambanan, stone reliefs recount ancient stories from the Mahabharata **and the** Ramayana. **Among the finest are those depicting the exploits and adventures of Arjuna, chief of the Pandava clan. This masterly head of Arjuna graces the ruins of the 13th-century Djago temple in eastern Java.**

THE EPICS IN THE ART OF SOUTH ASIA *(Continued from page 31)*

feeling or psychological insight which the Indian sculptor had brought to his work.

In the seventeenth century, Mughal painting takes a different turn, but artists continue to paint the epics. Now the scene shifts to Rajasthan where several series of magnificent paintings in long, extensive sets, are produced. The favourite theme with the Rajasthani painters is the *Ramayana* and many sets now in important collections all over the world have survived.

Although the technical level may not be as high, the lines lacking the same vibrancy, and the colour the same sophistication or enamelled brilliance of Mughal work, what has been gained is an intensity of emotion. In many of the Rajasthan paintings there is a quality of naivete and wonder at the beholding of divine form. These are products of a wonderful spiritual equilibrium. One feels that the artist fully believed in what he was painting.

That other great centre of miniature painting in India, the Punjab hills, showed an equal interest in the epics. One of the most famous sets of miniatures of the Hill or Pahari schools is the large *Ramayana*, many of whose unusually large-sized leaves are now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

The date of this set is a matter of controversy among scholars, but there can be little doubt about the quality of these paintings. In a scene like the siege of Lanka, the imaginative inventiveness of the Pahari painter, as he arranges whole armies of monkeys and bears covering the hillside outside the golden walls of the fortress of the demon-king, combines with his rich sense of colouring and design.

What is seen in these paintings above all is the feeling of wonder and humility with which the painter approached the subject. Here we have the mature flower of an ancient tradition. An even earlier set of paintings treating of the *Ramayana* theme, and dating possibly back to A.D. 1720, comes from the tiny principality of Guler in the Punjab Hills.

This is rendered in what is popularly referred to as the Basohli style, and has all the vigour and intensity associated with it. With the simplest possible palette, consisting of hot yellows and blues and reds, the artist of the hills has created in these paintings a magnificent world of Gods and heroes seen with eyes of devotion (see colour plate, page 22-23).

There are still other sets of the *Ramayana* from the Hills, an important and very extensive one coming from the remote hill State of Kulu, and popularly known among art historians as the Shangri *Ramayana*.

But the set which has perhaps the greatest amount of delicacy and refinement of treatment illustrates the moving episode of Nala and Damayanti from the *Mahabharata*. In this series of exquisite drawings, some partly coloured, the artist of the eighteenth century has left behind a masterpiece in terms of tenderness of feeling. The number of paintings in this set is not fully known although it appears to have been very large, but whatever has survived is of magnificent quality.

The most extensive of the sets of Pahari works is again a series of drawings. This series illustrating the entire story of the *Ramayana* has as many as seven hundred leaves, these being swiftly drawn in sanguine upon paper. The set is dated and signed: it was executed in A.D. 1816 for Raja Bhupinder Pal of Basohli by the artist Ranjha of the family of Pandit Seu.

The entire set is well preserved, and is now in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan at Benares. This makes it the most complete set of paintings of any themes from the epics anywhere in the world. And what is amazing is that nowhere in these hundreds of leaves is there any weakening of intensity or emotion.

A significant passage from the *Bal Kanda* of the *Ramayana* tells of the legendary author of the epic, Valmiki, realizing the story of Rama completely in his mind before setting to work. It was to gain this realization that "seating himself with his face towards the East and sipping water according to rule, he applied himself to the yogic contemplation of his theme.

"By virtue of his yoga power, he then clearly saw before him Rama, Lakshmana and Sita; as well as Dasaratha together with his wives, laughing, talking, acting, and moving, in his kingdom, as in real life. He beheld, by yoga power, all that had come to pass and all that was to come to pass in the future, like a nelli fruit on the palm of his hand. And having truly seen all by virtue of his concentration, the generous sage began the setting down of the history of Rama."

The artist of the great works of art of which we have spoken must also, one feels, have proceeded in a somewhat like manner.

FURTHER READING ON THE RAMAYANA AND THE MAHABHARATA

RAMAYANA

■ **The Ayodhya Canto of the Ramayana as told by Kamban**
Translated from the Tamil by C. Rajagopalachari. (Unesco Collection of Representative Works.) George Allen and Unwin, London, 1961 (16/-).

■ **Kavitavali**
by Tulsi Das.
Translated and with a Critical Introduction by Raymond Allchin. (Unesco Collection of Representative Works.) George Allen and Unwin, London, 1964 (32/-); R.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., New York. ($ 6.00).

■ **Ramayana (in prose)**
by C. Rajagopalachari.
Bhavan's Book Univ., Bombay, 1965 (paperback).

■ **The Ramayana and the Mahabharata**
Condensed into English verse by Romesh C. Dutt. Everymans's Library. J. M. Dent and Sons, London; Dutton, New York, 1966.

■ **The Holly Lake of the Acts of Rama**
by W. Douglas P. Hill.
New translation of Tulsi Das's **Ramacaritamanasa.**
Oxford Univ. Press, London, Calcutta, 1952.

■ **Thai Ramayana**
Retold from the original version written by King Rama I of Thailand. Chalermit Bookshop, Bangkok, 1965.

MAHABHARATA

■ **Mahabharata (in prose)**
by C. Rajagopalachari.
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■ **Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa**
Translated into English prose from the original Sanskrit by P. C. Roy, Oriental Publishing Co., Calcutta, 1956 (12 vol.).

■ **The Gospel of Selfless Action or the Gita according to Gandhi**
Translation of the original in Gujarati with an addition, introduction and commentary by Mahadev Desai, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1946.

■ **The Bhagavad-Gita**
Translated by S. Radhakrishnan. George Allen and Unwin, London, 1948.

■ **The Sita, the Song Supreme**
Introduction by S. Radhakrishnan. Taraporevala, Bombay, 1962.

■ **The Bhagavad-Gita**
Translated from the Sanskrit with an introduction by Juan Mascaro, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, London, 1962.

■ **The Song of God—Bhagavad-Gita**
Translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood with an introduction by Aldous Huxley, Phoenix House, London, 1956.

ABOUT THE MAHABHARATA

■ **Jnaneshvari**
by Jnaneshvar, incorporating the text of the Bhagavad-Gita (S. Radhakrishnan translation). Translated from the Marathi by V. G. Pradhan. Edited and with an introduction by H. W. Lambert (Vol. I). Unesco Collection of Representative Works. George Allen and Unwin, London, 1967 (52/6).

■ **Gita, the Mother**
by Gandhi.
Edited and published by A. T. Hingorani, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1965.

■ **The Teaching of the Gita**
by Gandhi.
Edited and published by A. T. Hingorani, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1962.

■ **Ethnography of Ancient India (Mahabharata)**
by R. Shafert.
Harrassovitz, Wiesbaden, 1954.

■ **On the meaning of the Mahabharata**
by V. S. Sukthankar.
Asiatic Society of Bombay, Bombay, 1957.

ABOUT BOTH EPICS

■ **Ancient Indonesian Art**
by A. J. Bernet Kempers.
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1959.

■ **Vyasa and Valmiki**
by A. Ghose.
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1956.

■ **Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change**
by Claire Holt.
Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1967.

■ **Epics, Myths and Legends of India**
by Paul Thomas.
Taraporevala Sons and Co., Bombay, 1945.

■ **The Loves of Krishna in Indian Painting and Poetry**
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George Allen and Unwin, London, 1957.

■ **A History of India (Vol. I)**
by Romila Thapar. Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, London 1966 (Pelican paperback, 7/6).

■ **History of Indian and Indonesian Art**
by A. K. Coomaraswamy.
Goldston, London; Hiersemann, Leipzig; Weyhe, New York, 1927.

■ **1000 Mythological Characters briefly described**
by Edward Sylvester Ellis.
Noble and Noble, New York, 1927.

■ **Indian Tales**
by Romila Thapar.
G. Bell and Sons, London, 1961.

■ **The Art of Indian Asia, its Mythology and Transformation**
by Heinrich Zimmer.
Edited by J. Campbell, Pantheon Books, New York, 1953.

Letters to the Editor

WAR OR PEACE ?

Sir,

Congratulations on the issue, "War or Peace?" (August-September 1967). It deserves the widest circulation particularly among young people since it makes us face up to our responsibilities and reveals the gravity of the disarmament problem. A great deal of nonsense has been written about the problem and one often feels that much of what is said about the critical danger threatening us all has neither rhyme nor reason. Your issue, however, was clear and concise, and I particularly welcome the publication of extracts from the Papal Encyclical. I shall make sure that my family and friends see the issue, not with the idea of creating a "war psychosis", but to encourage them to give deeper thought to the problem.

Simone Aviron-Violet
Lyon, France

Sir,

Your August-September issue is a wonderful presentation of facts that affirm what is necessary for world peace and international understanding. I was so impressed with the articles contributed by Philip Noel-Baker, His Holiness Pope Paul VI and Unesco's Director General, Mr René Maheu that I ordered more copies which I shall circulate among friends and members of our local United Nations Association. I have subscribed to your magazine for four years and always find it a mine of information (never a dull copy).

A.E. Green
United Nations Association
Broadstone, U.K.

LINK BETWEEN FRIENDS

Sir,

I love the "Unesco Courier", as do my friends who receive it when I finish reading it. One, a teacher in Kobe, Japan, says it is the best magazine he reads, and it is always in demand at his school library. Sometimes there are several areas of interest so the magazine goes to several friends in different countries.

Hugh Stewart Smith
Washington D.C., U.S.A.

A VAST INVENTORY

Sir,

The *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*, the inventory of Europe's medieval stained glass windows, is by no means an "unprecedented undertaking", as described in your April 1967 issue. It is one facet of a colossal enterprise, a vast and almost universal cultural inventory undertaken since 1924 by the International Academic Union, which comprises 27 of the world's principal academies in the fields of Letters and the Ethical and Political Sciences. In addition to a score of major undertakings, including the *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*, the Union sponsors many similar publications.

Our Union, whose headquarters are at the *Académie Royale de Belgique* (Brussels), benefits by subsidies from the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies. These subsidies are drawn from funds which the International Council, as an international non-governmental organization, receives from Unesco.

Prof. Henri Lavachery
Honorary Perpetual Secretary
to the Académie Royale
de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium

NOISE POLLUTION

Sir,

The harmful effects of noise are now invading the countryside. Two reasons are the increasing use of tractors and the opening of small workshops which do not comply with industrial health regulations, especially for the prevention of damage to hearing. City dwellers seeking a few weeks of rest and quiet in the countryside are sometimes obliged to cut short their vacations because certain villages have become so noisy. Your issue on Noise Pollution (July 1967) will be of prime interest to country people, particularly to school teachers, since in small communities which have neither doctor nor nurse, the teacher is the only person able to alert people to the harmful effects of noise on health.

Dr Pierre Rolland
Bourg-la-Reine, France

EDUCATION CO-OPERATORS'

Sir,

As an enthusiastic reader of the "Unesco Courier" since its debut, I have always regretted that it has not been more widely distributed in Argentina's schools.

I belong to the movement of "education co-operators", a civic group of thousands of Argentine citizens from all walks of life. This organization seeks to stimulate progressive changes in the teaching given in Argentina's schools, to ensure adequate working conditions and salaries for teachers and socio-medical assistance for schoolchildren from kindergarten age, to bring about an increase in the number of kindergartens, school clubs and school cantines and to press for new and better equipped school buildings. The movement also aims to associate its co-operating groups into area organizations so as to consolidate the progress already achieved in certain sectors.

This work has now become our "hobby". If there is to be any real community development and consequently any positive evolution of our society it will come, we are convinced, only if we succeed in improving present standards of public education.

G. E. Lopez Alvarado
Buenos Aires, Argentina

THE NAMING OF MONTREAL

Sir,

The caption of a photo illustrating the article on Canada ("A Culture in the Making") in your April 1967 issue, tells us that Jacques Cartier gave the name "Montreal" to the city he founded near Mount Royal.

Francis the First, of France, in consenting to help Jacques Cartier to search for new lands to the west of the Island of Hierro (most westerly island of the Canaries), and in agreement with the Pope, instructed the explorer to give the name "Montreal" to the first town founded by him in Canada. This was to honour the young Cardinal de Medicis, Bishop of Avignon in France and of Montreale, a small town near Palermo, Sicily. Cardinal de Medicis had been instrumental in obtaining the Pope's agreement to Cartier's enterprise.

Eugene Guernier
Institute of Political Studies
University of Paris

WORLD PEACE ARMY

Sir,

Daily we hear of more and more tragedies taking place in Viet-Nam and the world's other trouble spots. The forces of the United States and its allies in South-East Asia, we are told, are at present working to clear jungle and build villages for refugees.

Setting aside the political arguments, I have often wondered why rehabilitation is so much more readily carried out in wartime than in peace time.

I wonder if it would not be possible to set up a World Peace Army whose weapons would be not rockets and H-bombs, but bulldozers and tractors. The army could be run in a similar manner to modern forces. It should be controlled by the United Nations and would be on hand to help in any region where natural disasters wrought widespread destruction.

Among those places where I suggest it could be sent today is India to help famine relief. It could also have been sent to North-Eastern Italy to help combat the floods and to places such as Skopje, which have been devastated by earth tremors. It is clear that preference should be given to the developing nations.

This army and other world organizations might help to foster good international relations and help bring peace and unity throughout mankind.

G. H. Rowe (aged 15)
Coleraine, Co. Londonderry, U.K.

Imp. GEORGES LANG, PARIS. IMPRIMÉ EN FRANCE.

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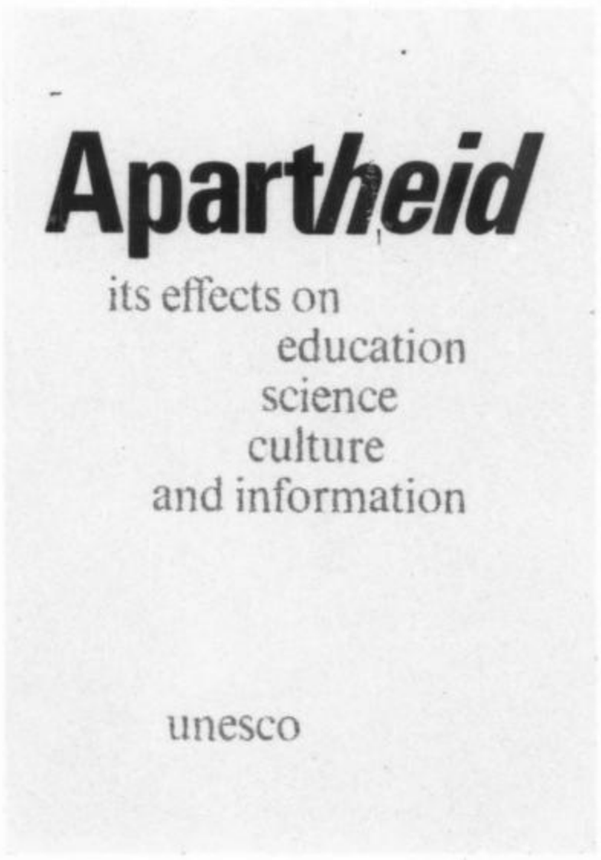

"Apartheid is not only an inadmissible answer to racial and group conflict but is itself the major source of this conflict."

This is the conclusion of a report just published by Unesco on the effects of apartheid on education, science, culture and information in South Africa.

Based on official government publications and on reports from scientific and research institutions within and outside South Africa, the report investigates:

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Photo © Roger Viollet

Epics in the stones of Angkor

The two ancient Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana,* have fired the imagination of generations of poets and artists in India and much of Asia. Among the countless works of art inspired by stories from these works are thousands of bas-reliefs and sculptures carved in the stupendous 12th-century Khmer temple-city complex of Angkor (Cambodia). In the largest of the temples, Angkor Wat, scenes of epic grandeur from both epics cover over 13,000 square feet on the walls of just the first floor gallery. This detail is from a panel depicting armies of monkeys helping Rama, hero of the *Ramayana,* to vanquish his enemies.